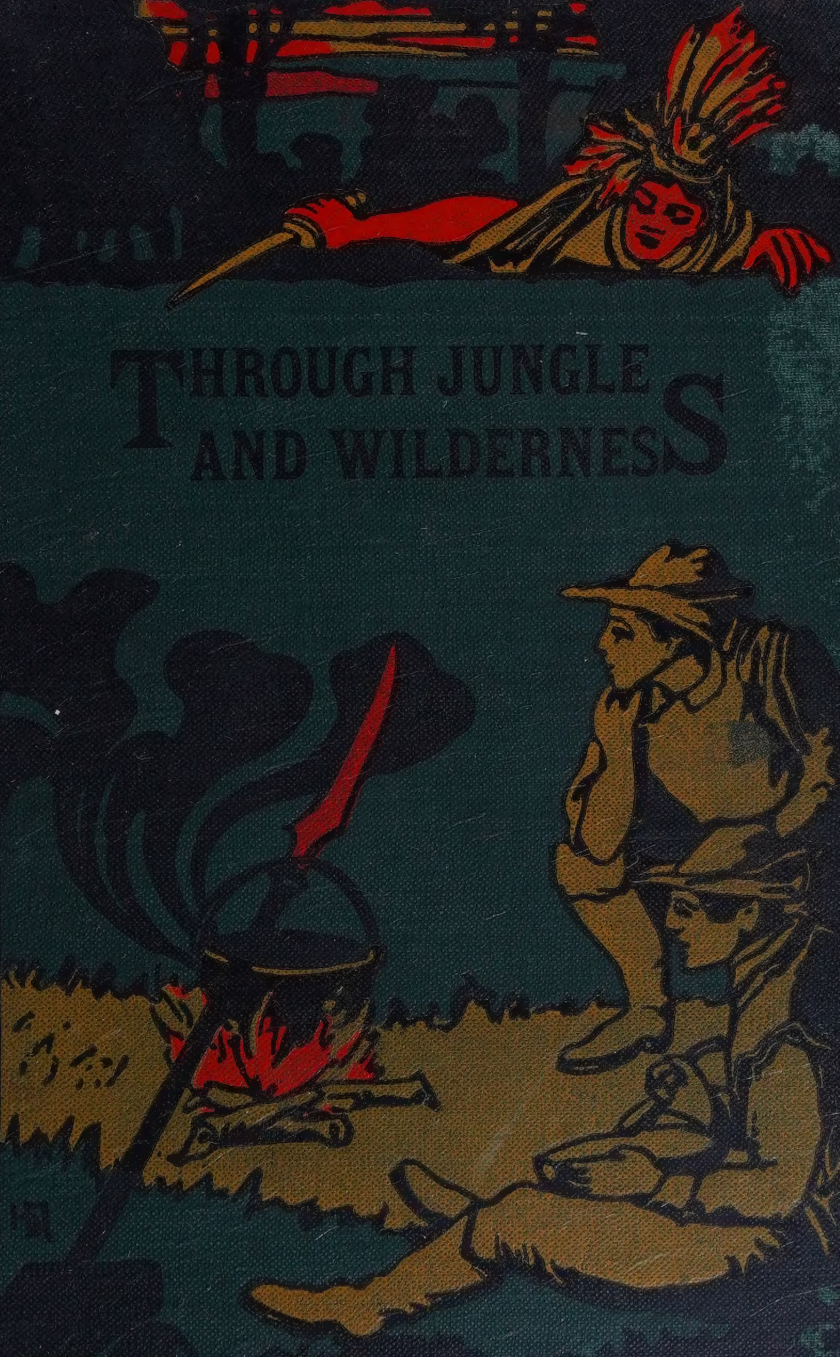
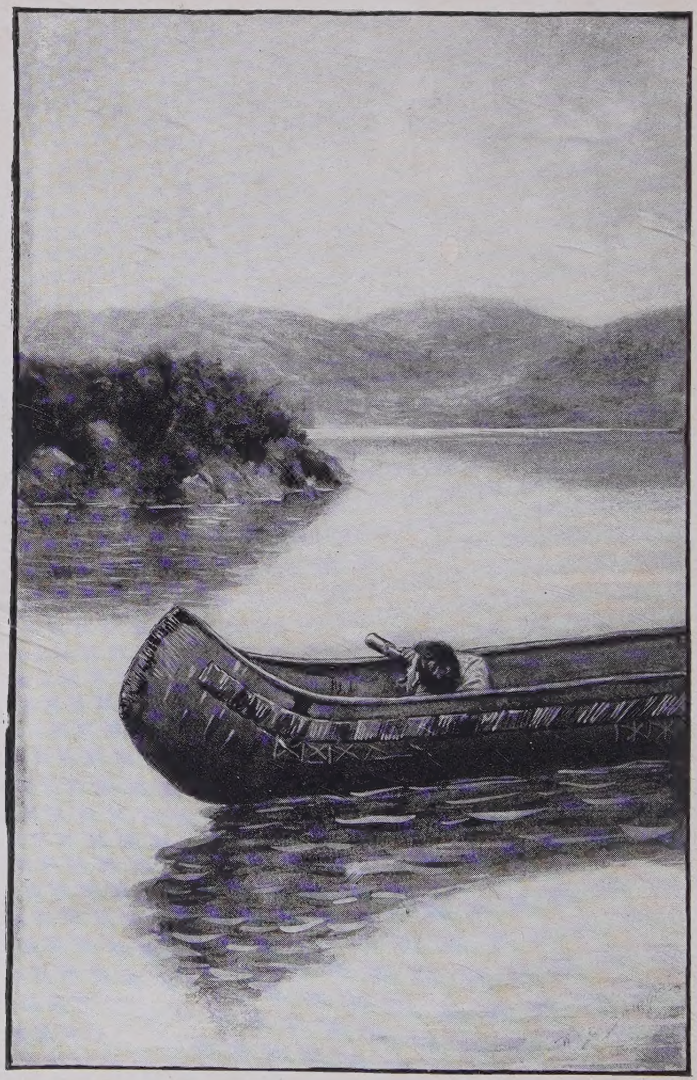

THROUGH JUNGLE
AND WILDERNESS

Leslie C. Utter.

Christmas.

1902.



"HE POINTED THE MUZZLE OF HIS FIELD-GLASS OVER THE EDGE OF THE CANOE, AND SCRUTINIZED THE HAUNTED ISLAND."—PAGE 287.

THROUGH JUNGLE AND WILDERNESS

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

AUTHOR OF "THE LAND OF WONDERS," "A WAIF OF THE MOUNTAINS," "RED PLUME," ETC.

THE MERSHON COMPANY

RAHWAY, N. J. NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1899, BY
THE MERSHON COMPANY.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	What Befell the Schooner "Mary Ann,"	1
II.	Fighting a Whale,	11
III.	A Strange Peril,	21
IV.	A Desperate Swimming Race,	31
V.	On the Coast,	36
VI.	A Shadowy Danger,	46
VII.	Thieves of the Night,	56
VIII.	A Startling Robbery,	66
IX.	In the Lion's Den,	76
X.	On the Brink of Success or Failure,	86
XI.	A Daring Effort,	96
XII.	Treed,	106
XIII.	Wandering in the Wood,	116
XIV.	Traveling Inland,	126
XV.	Vega, the Guide,	136
XVI.	In the Solitudes,	146
XVII.	A Terrible Danger,	156
XVIII.	The Search,	166
XIX.	A Happy Meeting,	176
XX.	In a Tropical Forest,	186
XXI.	The Haunted Island,	196
XXII.	A Lonely Encampment,	206
XXIII.	Wonderful Music in the Air,	216
XXIV.	Reconnoitering the Haunted Island,	222

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXV.	On the Haunted Island,	230
XXVI.	A Strange Exploration,	237
XXVII.	Subterranean Explorations,	245
XXVIII.	A Desperate Scheme,	252
XXIX.	In the Furnace,	262
XXX.	Running for Life,	270
XXXI.	An Alarming Discovery—A Disappointment,	278

Through Jungle and Wilderness

CHAPTER I

WHAT BEFELL THE SCHOONER "MARY ANN"

NEAR the middle of the month of May, 1868, a singular accident befell the coasting schooner *Mary Ann,* while on a voyage from Panama to lower California.

The vessel, at the time of the misfortune, was off a projection of land between Acapulco and Coynca, and was sailing along in a mild sea, with a clear sky overhead, and with every prospect of a pleasant and uneventful voyage; for the season was not only favorable for such a consummation, but the schooner was under the command of one of the most skillful captains along the Pacific coast.

That officer was John Winch, a native of Boston, a whaler of a dozen years' experience, and a veteran of the ocean who had commanded an East Indiaman, and who was known and in demand in a score of the leading seaports of the globe.

At first thought it will seem strange to our readers that, if Captain Winch was such an experienced and

valuable officer, he should content himself with the charge of a small coasting schooner, creeping along at regular intervals between Panama, and Lower California; but the explanation which the captain gave us, when talking over the matter with him, will be accepted as sufficient by all those who may feel any interest in him and his fortunes.

While on one of his voyages, a dozen years before, Captain Winch formed a strong attachment for a Mexican lady whom he met at Vera Cruz. The affection was mutual and in a brief time the two were married. Not until then did the captain learn that his bride was possessed of considerable wealth; and, as the old salt, like most of his class, was a rolling stone that was never able to gather any moss, we cannot but think that the discovery was not the most unpleasant one that he could have made.

The wife wished her husband to abandon those long voyages which sometimes kept him away from his native land for years at a time, and he was equally desirous of remaining at home and enjoying as much of the society of his beautiful and amiable wife as possible.

As is generally the case, it was the wife who solved the problem, and it was done in the easiest manner possible.

The captain had been a follower of the sea so long that he was fitted for no other business, and if he were,

he was sure to find it hard work to settle down to the steady, unchanging routine of some different occupation; so the wife purchased a coasting schooner for him and paid for it herself, turning it over to him as a little "testimonial" of her respect for her gallant husband.

The captain selected his own coasting-ground, and she made the first few voyages in his company; but, as he was gone but a short time on these little trips, she finally settled in Panama, where her home became one of the most delightful we have ever known.

All this, bear in mind, was a dozen years before the incident that must be related with the least possible delay.

The schooner *Mary Ann,* while on the voyage up the Mexican coast in the month of May, 1868, had six souls on board. In the first place, there was Captain Winch himself, grizzled, scarred and weather-beaten by his buffetings with storm and tempest in every zone round the wide world, but with a heart in which the sunshine was always shining; and then came his three men that composed his crew, all good and trusty sailors, who had served under him for years, and who could not be enticed away by any sort of service or amount of wages.

Besides these there were two very important personages whom we have purposely left for the last.

One was the captain's brother-in-law, Señor Alfredo

Alfiero, christened in the American style by the captain as "Frede."

He was a gentleman of education and wealth, who had traveled a great deal, who was still unmarried, and whose earthly affections seemed centred in three persons. The first of these was his brother-in-law, the American captain, the second was his only sister, the wife of the captain, and last, but not least, was the only child of the couple, little Jack Winch, barely ten years of age, who was the remaining member of the crew of the *Mary Ann* on the voyage of which we have made mention.

The captain was one of the sturdiest of Americans, as he showed in everything. When his wife made him the present of the saucy little schooner, it bore the name of some one of the innumerable saints held in such high repute in the Roman Catholic countries, a name which filled him with such dislike that he drew the paint-brush through it and christened it the *Mary Ann.*

"There," he said, as he stood off a small ways and admired it, "nobody can make any mistake about *that* name. That's genuine American all over."

And then, before he married his wife, she was known as Senorita Peggiota, but the captain shortened it by pronouncing it "Peggy," and when her brother came along he was called "Frede," as we have already shown, though the captain preferred to make that still more American by dubbing him "Fred."

The two thus named accepted their titles without the least objection on their part, and somehow or other seemed to love the honest old captain the more for his sturdy pride in his own country and institutions.

The only child which came to bless this happy union was named for his father, as a matter of course, and everybody came to know him as "Jack," and, while he possessed his mother's beautiful, dark, lustrous eyes and her expressive mouth, yet there was something in the make-up of the lad which led the father's acquaintances, when they stopped at his house, to pronounce him a chip of the old block.

But Uncle Frede came to the conclusion that there was never such a wonderful boy born into this world as little Jack. He visited his sister when the child was about a year old, and that settled his business, so to speak.

"Uncle Frede" had just completed his arrangements for making a lengthy tour through the United States, and had run down to Panama to bid his beloved sister good-by; but after spending two or three days at her home he concluded that it would never do to exile himself from such a phenomenon as her boy. Despite its tender age, he insisted that his sister should allow him to take the little fellow along with him, promising to provide a half dozen servants who should anticipate his every wish; but the mother speedily convinced him

of the absurdity of the proposition, and he said no more about it until the time came for him to go, when he bade the husband and wife good-by, and departed, as the couple believed, to be gone for years, but at the end of a month he reappeared among his friends, who were as much surprised as delighted. In answer to their inquiries, he felt that it was his duty to come down to Panama and see that that child had justice done him. There was no telling what might happen while he, the wise uncle, was away. He had concluded to defer his American tour until the lad should become old enough to bear him company.

This will illustrate the affection which the uncle formed for the boy—an affection which could hardly be placed second to that of the parents themselves.

As Jack grew older, he was allowed to go on little excursions with his relative, and it was arranged that within a few months of the time to which we refer he was to be taken North and placed in an American institution of learning.

Uncle Frede was quite a naturalist and hunter, and the two had made several journeys together into the dense forests which so abound in that part of the tropics in which the lad was born.

They had gone on numerous voyages with the father up the coast, and had extracted much enjoyment therefrom; but the most eventful one was that of which we

are speaking; and, having finished the few words that were necessary by way of introduction, we shall now proceed with our narrative.

The day, it will be remembered, was mild and clear, and there was no one on board the *Mary Ann* who was looking for anything out of the ordinary course, matters flowing along as quietly as it does with the boy who is on his way to school, and who is confident that he knows every word of his lessons.

Uncle Frede and Jack were standing at the bow of the schooner looking off to sea, and watching a score or more of whales continually rising and blowing about the vessel.

They had seen these before, and indeed the sight was so common that they were looking at them for want of something better to do.

Some of them were so close to the *Mary Ann* that they would have caused alarm among the crew had the men been strangers to the sight.

When a great broad, dark area of surface suddenly heaved up to view within stone's throw of the vessel the lad would call out to his uncle to look, and the two would watch the sportive monster until it sank out of sight a few minutes after.

So long as these leviathans of the deep are undisturbed by the passing steamers and vessels, there is no danger, and there are few of our readers who have

made the voyage to California that have not passed through a school of whales at their gambols—the enormous creatures playing around the ships like the porpoises along the Atlantic coast.

The *Mary Ann* had been gliding through this school for something over an hour, and was nearly clear of them, when Jack called out, in the greatest excitement:

"Look there, Uncle Frede! there is a whale coming right for us!"

"Nonsense! they wouldn't do that unless we should interfere with them, and then——"

The gentleman said no more, for he as well as Captain Winch, who happened to be standing near, saw that the boy had spoken the truth.

No more than a hundred yards away, the ocean was lashed into foam, such as is seen when the cyclone sweeps over its vast waste, and amid the rush and swirl and tempest was distinguishable the front of an enormous whale, making straight for the *Mary Ann*.

There was no possible escape from the blow more than there is for the Alpine village which lies in the path of the descending avalanche.

The whale was scarcely seen when he struck the ship just quartering her bow, and stove an immense hole clean through her planking.

Captain Winch had witnessed something like this before, in the upper Pacific, when his vessel collided with

one of the creatures, and he expected to see the whale return to the charge until the schooner went down; but, instead of doing so, after delivering its tremendous butt, it turned about and was soon indistinguishable among the many of its species that were in the rear of the injured vessel.

Captain Winch still hoped to save his pet vessel, which was filling rapidly, especially as the projecting land was no more than a mile distant.

The crew were set to work filling the opening through which the water was pouring with frightful rapidity, and the boat was headed directly toward shore, with all sail crowded.

The wind was so light that the movement was slow, but the men were quite successful in checking the break.

"Now, if they will let us alone," said the captain, alluding to the whales, "we shall be able to make land and save her."

The progress continued slow, and there was no little apprehension that the whale which had delivered such a crushing blow would send in another, in which event the vessel was sure to go down, and the crew would have to take to their boats that were held in instant readiness against such an emergency.

"We have so shifted our position," said Alfredo, "that the whale has gone off among his comrades to tell of his exploit, so that I think he will have hard work

to find us if he should wish to do so. I suppose we must have angered him by bumping against him."

"I presume so, though I have no recollection of any jar such as would have resulted——"

"Oh, father! there he comes again!" broke in the terrified Jack.

"So he is," responded the parent, as his scarred countenance put on a deeper expression of alarm; "the days of the *Mary Ann* are numbered!"

CHAPTER II

FIGHTING A WHALE

WHEN a leviathan of the deep makes up his mind to go for a vessel which has crossed his path, there isn't much hope of the craft escaping the terrific collision.

Like a skillful boxer, the whale seemed to have measured very carefully his distance, and when he delivered the second blow, it was of the most destructive character.

The explosion of a torpedo could scarcely have been more fatal in its results.

The latter charge of the monster took the *Mary Ann* in almost precisely the same point that received the first.

The result was not only the driving in of the blankets and stuffing placed there to prevent the inflow of the water, but the opening was doubled in size, and the ocean was heard rushing inward, like the sweep of a raceway.

The schooner was doomed beyond all hope, and must soon go to the bottom—a result which Captain Winch saw even before the whale struck his craft the second time.

The *Mary Ann* was provided with but the single small boat, which was lowered on the instant—no time being lost in placing water or provisions within, when the shore was so close that the necessity did not exist.

Time only was taken to place the six souls within, with the oars, when they shoved off and pulled for land.

Rapid as had been these movements—and the men understood their work so well, that there was no delay—the crew had no more than launched themselves upon the Pacific, when it was seen that the schooner had sunk to her deck, and in a few more minutes must disappear forever from sight.

Two or three long powerful pulls at the oars placed the small boat out of danger of being drawn into the momentary maelstrom always created by the sinking of a large body in deep water, and the captain and his men rested on their blades to watch the vessel as she went down.

Only a short time were they forced to wait.

Steadily the stern sank, until the deck and gunwale appeared to rest for a moment, as if gathering for the last plunge, and then the bow rose high in air, poised itself for an instant, and then slid down as if it were descending a grooved plain, shooting out of sight into the bottom of the Pacific.

It had gone to join the great fleet which had been

gathering for thousands of years in the great deep, whose crews shall remain in those cavernous depths until that great day when the sea shall give up its dead.

As was a characteristic custom of Captain Winch, different from the usual practice, to keep the Star-Spangled Banner floating from the topmast, so that the last glimpse they obtained of the gallant little vessel was that beautiful banner, as it swept downward and shot hissing beneath the surface.

"There!" exclaimed the captain, with a sigh, "there goes one of the best little vessels that ever floated; but thank God she takes none of us with her, and as soon as I get back to Panama, to the best little wife in the world, I shall have her counterpart to sail over the same ground with her. Pull away, my hearties, for shore."

Having escaped a watery grave, it was to be supposed that the small boat, with its half-dozen occupants, was safe from further peril.

And so ordinarily they would have been, but the school of whales which had resented this intrusion upon their domains in such a marked manner was still about them, and to reach the land it was necessary to make their way through them.

Captain Winch held strong hope of accomplishing this successfully, but he was not without some dread that the same infuriated monster might be prowling

so near them that he would take means of completing the disastrous work so well begun.

He grasped a couple of oars himself, and instructed the others to row with great caution, feeling every foot of the way, as it may be said, while they held themselves in readiness to back water, or to shoot ahead as swiftly as possible, just as the emergency might demand.

Here and there, at varying distances, the surface of the water was broken by some of the immense creatures coming to the top, while the fountain-like jets that continually shot into the air showed that there was enough lubricating material afloat to furnish a goodly-sized city.

As yet, none of these creatures had appeared close enough to the little boat to excite alarm, or to raise the fear that they had any designs against the occupants thereof.

Young Jack and his uncle were seated near the stern of the boat, looking ahead at the land they were approaching, more than at the water around them, though they occasionally took a glance at closer objects, for they instinctively felt that the perils were yet threatening them.

The captain, like a true commander, used his eyes continually, sensible that death was liable to come from any quarter and at any time.

Jack saw that they were approaching a shore, which was low and sandy, but in the interior it rapidly rose into hills and mountainous ranges, among which he knew all manner of animals and strange reptiles and plants were to be found.

He was thinking what a grand thing it would be if his uncle would lead him upon some exploring expedition into the interior, where they would be sure to discover enough wonders to last them a lifetime as a theme for discussion.

Jack had got thus far, we say, when he turned to ask his father whether some arrangement was not possible by which such an exploration could be made; but he observed that the attention of his parent was so taken in the management of the boat, that, like a wise boy, he concluded to let him alone until a better opportunity was presented.

The lad leaned over the gunwale and looked down into the water, which was so clear that he could penetrate a great depth.

The sea was calm, the little craft occasionally rising on the top of one of those long heavy swells so peculiar to the Pacific.

There was nothing like the short chopping sea natural to the Atlantic at certain seasons.

The boy knew he was looking deep down into the crystalline depths; but, far as it was, it gave him no glimpse of the bottom.

That was so far, far below that the strongest vision could not penetrate to the bottom.

A whale blew so near the boat and so directly in front, that the captain suddenly changed the direction they were pursuing, and uttered an expression of surprise.

"If that should happen to be the critter that butted in the side of the *Mary Ann*," said he, "I'd really believe that he was after us and no mistake."

But the whale had sunk out of sight almost at the same minute that he sent up his fountain into the air, and there was no real alarm felt concerning his intentions.

Very probably there was no cause for any fear, though the events that immediately followed were of that nature to give grounds at least for doubt.

Little Jack was looking down into the water over the gunwale, and was admiring the opacity and clearness, when he noticed that it was growing darker below him.

It was as if they were rowing over a shallow portion where the black, muddy bottom was coming into view.

This dark, cloud-like tinge grew more and more marked, and was still deepening swiftly, when he called attention to it.

"Uncle Frede, look how black the water is getting."

"What are you talking about, my boy? There is no difference in the current. It is all the same."

"No, it isn't; look over the side of the boat and you'll see what I mean," persisted the lad.

The man laughingly complied, and at the first glance excitedly called out to his brother-in-law:

"Good heavens! Back water quick! or we are lost."

The captain discovered his danger at the same instant.

An immense whale was rising to the surface directly beneath the boat and its occupants.

The latter were given just time to learn the nature of their danger when it broke upon them.

The next thing of which all became conscious was that they were ascending in the air.

The whale had made its way upward in such a way that the craft, of course, preceded him, and was still going when it received a flirt from its tail which ended its career.

Such a blow is always destructive, and it proved so in the present instance.

Had the engine of death hit the boat fairly, it is scarcely possible that a single one of the inmates could have escaped.

As it was, one of the seamen was killed so quickly that he scarcely knew what it was that slew him.

A second was so badly stunned by the same tre-

mendous flirt of the tail, that he drowned before he could recover enough of his energy to make an effort to swim.

There were but four who entirely escaped all injury; the captain, Uncle Frede, little Jack and one of the sailors.

All were excellent swimmers, the lad having acquired the art when he was several years younger, and with the shore scarcely more than half a mile away, there seemed little doubt that they would succeed in making it.

But the captain was afraid of another flirt of that terrible engine which had already worked such destruction.

"Here, Jack," he called out, as he grabbed the arm of his boy, "take hold of my collar and hold fast till we get out of this confounded place. All you've got to do is to hang on to me."

The lad was one whose faith in his parent was unlimited, and he would have followed his directions as implicitly as did Casabianca without himself attempting to reason as to the result.

He gripped the coat-collar with all the strength at his command, and with the determination to hold on until he was told to let go, even though it carried him straight to the bottom of the sea.

As Jack rose on the top of the swell, he looked off to

the North, and saw the green rise of vegetation which marked the exuberant vegetation which is such a marked characteristic of this portion of the tropics, and the thought occurred to him in that single instant that he was able to swim all the way to terra firma, though distance at sea is so deceptive that it is probable that he was deceived in his calculation.

But he had his father as his reliance, and he held on and waited to follow his directions, unfaltering as ever in his faith.

That one flirt of the tail, besides killing the two seamen, shattered the boat to splinters and lashed the sea around into foam.

It was all done in a twinkling as it may be said, when the great cause of the mischief sank out of sight.

Uncle Frede and the other sailor were striking out for land, and the captain, with his powerful stroke, was able not only to maintain his lead, but to gain upon them.

The trouble was, that this whale—if he were the cause of all the mischief—was acting so strangely that there was no calculating what freak he might take into his head.

He might come up beneath them and give them another taste of what he could do with that same tail, and he might not be seen at all.

At any rate the safest course the three men and boy

could pursue was to make a change of base as quickly as possible, and that is precisely what they were trying their utmost to accomplish.

"Hold on now; take a good long breath; I'm going to dive down about half a mile."

Young Jack heard the words, and obeyed the suggestion.

He had barely time to draw in one great draught of air when the cool waters closed over him.

From some cause the captain had taken a dive, carrying his boy with him.

The submerging was a long one, and it tried the lungs of the boy to the utmost.

But the father knew how much his boy could stand, and though he approached the very verge, he did not carry him over.

Down, down the lad felt himself sinking, until it seemed they were making their way to the very bottom of the Pacific, from which there was scarcely a possibility of their ever rising again.

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE PERIL

But when the rushing, humming noise was the strongest in the ears of the boy, he became aware that there was a change in the course he was pursuing.

First came the momentary halt, such as is made when a diver gathers himself for the ascent.

This was followed by a convulsive motion of the body of the captain, who, now having touched the bottom, was calling in his strength for the upward spring.

The next instant the ascent was begun.

Still little Jack held the hot air imprisoned in his lungs until it seemed that the distended air-vessels must burst.

He knew that they were hastening to the glorious air and sunlight, and in a short time he could open his mouth and draw in the life-giving atmosphere.

All he had to do was to hold on for a few more throbs of his heart until the intervening distance should be passed.

At such a time, one's thoughts surge through the mind with amazing swiftness.

While Jack Winch was under the water with his

father, he did as much thinking as would have occupied his mind for a day during ordinary times.

Some of his imaginings, too, were of the most whimsical character.

He thought of mother, father, uncle, and of the dinner he ate just before this whale came along and upset things.

He thought of his playmates at home—of the handsome jack-knife in his pocket—of several not very creditable things he had done to his playmates—of the whale—of Uncle Frede—of his father, who was towing him through the water like a steam-tug—of the whale again—and so on.

The mind is so capable of rapid lightning-like action that we could not begin to give a tenth part of all the fancies which thronged upon the lad, and caused him to think the time he spent under water was far greater than it really was.

When the point was reached where he felt that he could stand no more, he saw that he had risen to the surface, and he opened his mouth with a gasp for breath.

How the cool air revived him as he swallowed the life-giving oxygen, which seemed to penetrate to every portion of his panting system.

The instant Jack could clear away the water from his eyes, he looked about him.

Just then he was in the act of floating to the top of another long swell, and his father called out:

"Hang fast to me, my hearty, and we shall be all right; but that blasted fish is still flopping about, and it will take some time to pull clear of him!"

"He don't seem to be anywhere in sight," said the boy. "Shan't I let go and swim for shore?"

"Wait till I tell you to do so," said the parent, sternly. "I'm running this row, and am captain of the crew whether they're in the *Mary Ann* or the sea——"

Before the captain could finish all he had to say, the lad saw something resembling a dark cloud rising so near his face that he was stunned and stupefied, unable to guess what it meant.

He was about to call the attention of his father to it, when there came a shock worse than any of the earthquakes which he had felt in the tropics, and the next sensation was that of floating alone in the water.

In spite of his determination to hold fast to his protector, his grasp was shaken loose, and he was obliged to move hands and feet to keep afloat.

The lad would have cared nothing for this, but for the pang it caused him that his father would think he was disobeying him, while matters were in that confused state that he could not decide for himself what was best to do.

"Father, father!" he called out. "Where are you? Something knocked me loose!"

"Never mind about that," called back the cheery voice of his parent. "Keep swimming and look out for the whale. The blasted lubber is here again!"

"What shall I do if he comes for me again?" asked Jack, looking sharply about for their common enemy.

"Dodge him as best you can; keep down in the water, so that he can't see you."

"That's what I'm trying to do."

Were they never to get clear of the monster which seemed bent on the destruction of the captain and his son?

Once more the whale came to the surface, and this time he was actually beneath the two.

It so happened that the veteran had been caught the same way years before when in the Arctic Ocean, and such a sailor as he knew precisely what to do.

The very instant he was sure the leviathan was under him, he made a furious dive and plunge to one side, which carried him clear of the whale and into deep water.

He had no fear for himself, confident in his own ability to steer clear of his great foe, no matter how persistent he might be in pursuing him.

But his anxiety was for little Jack, who was unaccustomed to this sort of peril.

As good a swimmer as the lad was, he was not the one to do the best thing, unless through accident. Liable to become confused, the danger was that of getting in the way of the monster, and one blow from his tail would end his young life forever.

The captain, therefore, had a desperate task on his hands.

Beside looking after his own safety, he felt that he must do his utmost for the lad.

Uncle Frede was in the same boat, figuratively speaking.

He and the sailor who had started for the shore had managed, through fortuitous chance, to get out of the regular track of the whale, and had only to persevere in swimming to make land, where there was nothing to fear from the great creature following them.

Perhaps it would have been best if they had kept on, for all that could be done for the boy was sure to be done by his father.

The seaman was evidently of that opinion, for when he found the way comparatively open before him, he kept straight ahead with that long, steady sweep of his powerful arms which marks the skillful swimmer when he sets out for a long distance, and he never increased or slackened his speed until he dropped his feet, and they touched the hard sand on the bottom.

Then he walked out, and he was safe at least.

With Uncle Frede the case was different.

It seemed to him too much like desertion to make for shore, when his relatives—and especially his nephew—was in such danger.

The foam and splash of the sea, together with the words which passed between Captain Winch and his son, told him of the desperate character of the peril which threatened the boy, and despite the cold water enveloping him, the hot chills ran down his back at the belief that the lad was environed by a frightful danger from which he could not extricate himself.

"He is doomed unless we can help him," was his conclusion, as he turned about and put straight for the scene of death.

The cry of the lad told Frede that Jack had become separated from his father, and the whale was so near that it seemed that nothing less than a miracle could keep him out of the way of the creature.

The latter was certainly comporting himself with a consistent madness little short of the wonderful.

Sometimes the whale, when harpooned by his enemies, makes havoc among them, but his actions are generally guided by a sort of blind fury that makes him dangerous more on account of his great size than from any regular pursued line of attack.

The skillful whalesman has little fear of anything more than a ducking when his boat goes to destruction,

and he finds himself in the water a half mile from the ship.

But, strange as it may seem, the fish in the present instance appeared to know that he had two of his foes at his mercy, and he showed no disposition to allow them to escape him.

And yet as we have shown, the immense bulk of the fish is such that if a swimmer can keep his presence of mind he need have little fear of eluding the leviathan, if he is only fortunate enough to avoid the first blow of the enormous fan-like tail, which is fatal to the strongest whale-boat that gets in the way.

Young Jack, it will be remembered, was swimming in the water and doing his utmost to reach his father, from whom he had become separated when the creature came to the surface beneath him.

Enormous as was the size of the *mammalia,* it came up so quickly that the boy did not realize what was going on until he found himself lifted out of the water, and lying stretched at full length on the back of the monster.

The whale was one of the largest of his species, and that portion of his back which came to above surface was some twenty feet long by a dozen in width.

As Jack was in the act of swimming when caught in this manner, he lay flat upon his face, and actually made several movements with his arms and legs before

he saw that the necessity therefor had passed for the time. Then he lay still and looked around him. There was the calm sea, the long glassy heave scarcely disturbing its face, and off to the right, was plainly discernible the line of shore, while all around was the ocean, with no sight of any of his friends from whom he had parted but a short time before.

"I wonder if the whale knows he has me on his back?" said Jack to himself, lying very still for fear of disturbing him. "If he don't I'll get a good chance to rest, and maybe can slip off and swim to land without his knowing what has become of me."

After lying thus a minute or so, he stealthily raised his head, and peered forward to learn whether the monster was aware of the singular load he was carrying. The head of the whale was mostly submerged, and the lad was unable, from his position, to catch a glimpse of his eyes, from which he concluded that such a pygmy as he was not perceptible on the back of such a mass of life. Whether the whale was aware that he was carrying a mite of humanity can only be conjectured, but it may be presumed that he was not. If he had known that he was floating one of his enemies, it is not likely he would have continued the favor; but, taking the simplest means of dislodging him, by diving, would have manœuvred again so as to bring him under his ponderous tail.

Instead of doing so, he began moving slowly through the sea, as if he were searching for his prey. There was a thrilling excitement about this, which was not lessened by the fact that the whale, instead of heading toward land, had pointed his nose to the northwest, in the very line which, if persevered in long enough, would land the rider in the frigid waters of the Arctic Ocean.

"What shall I do?"

This was the question which Jack Winch put to himself a score of times in as many seconds, and which he found it impossible to answer.

The most obvious course that suggested itself was that he should quietly slip off his perch into the water and strike out for land.

But he was held fast by the fear that the moment he moved, the creature would learn of his presence, and then the fight would be renewed with all the chances against the lad's life.

The whale was making away from land and going quite swiftly through the water, and every minute thus spent was not only increasing the distance from shore, but it rendered the difficulty of reaching it and of escaping the creature the greater.

"Father! father! where are you? tell me what I shall do?" called out Jack, in his terror, feeling that the peril was such that he must have assistance or perish.

As he cried out in his agony, he looked around in the

hope of catching sight of the massive head and shoulders of his beloved parent and hearing his cheery voice.

But he could see nothing of him, nor did the welcome cheer come back to him.

"He is drowned! he is drowned!" wailed the poor lad, "and I don't want to live if he is gone!"

CHAPTER IV

A DESPERATE SWIMMING RACE

But to none is life sweeter than to the young. Scarcely had the despairing thought entered the mind of Jack Winch when the whale which was supporting him dived. Before the youth knew what had taken place, he found himself swimming, while the vast leviathan was plunging downward with arrowy speed, not to stop perhaps until he had reached a depth of a thousand feet.

The next instant the lad struck out lustily for land, fortunately not far distant, and he was thrilled by the sound of his father's voice:

"Keep it up, my boy; or that whale will come up and swallow you!"

Captain Winch and Frede were coming toward him, but at a moderate rate, for there seemed no need of haste. When the three joined company, the laugh of the veteran whaler rang out loud and clear, for he felt that all danger was over.

But never was a greater mistake made.

The three were swimming at a leisurely speed, when Jack, who was a few feet to the rear, asked:

"Did you see that, father?"

"Did I see what?"

"There's some sort of fish, a little way behind me, acting as if he wished to keep us company. He can beat that whale out of sight, for just now its fin shot through the water swifter than anything I ever saw."

The two men looked at each other in dismay.

They said nothing, but they understood what it meant.

Jack had seen the fin of a shark—one of those hyenas of the deep, dreaded more than any other native of the ocean.

They said nothing of the new and frightful peril, which was far greater than that they had suffered from the whale, but the captain, in his bantering way, spoke:

"Jack, I'll make you a bet that Frede and I can beat you swimming to the shore. If you beat us, I'll give you the handsomest present you ever had in all your life."

And the father pushed his speed, with a view of urging the lad to greater efforts on the instant.

The boy of course was unsuspicious of any danger, but father and uncle were in an agony of terror on his account.

They knew too well what the shark of the tropics is, and they were well aware that if he should make a raid upon them, he could bite one of them in two as

easily as if he was placed beneath the blade of the guillotine.

But the shore was so close that there was time to reach it, if the terrific creature would hold off for a few minutes.

The captain slipped his hand down and drew his knife, a formidable weapon, which he always carried with him.

Grasping this in his right hand, where it would be ready for instant use, he looked significantly at his companion, as if to tell him to keep watch for the shark, and in case he was seen again to notify him at once.

Alfredo nodded his head. He understood him and would do so.

But little Jack was well tired out, and like all such lads, he did not want to attempt to make a spurt on the home-stretch without a commensurate wager.

"I want to know what the bet is going to be," he said, increasing his speed somewhat, but still lingering to pick up what chances offered.

"Anything you've a mind to," answered his father, who was too terrified to stop on particulars, "but we're so close to land that you must hurry up and make it, or it will be too late."

"All right, I have a bet; will you make it?"

"Yes, sir. Hurry up."

"If I beat you and Uncle Frede in reaching land, then you are to let him and me go across the country to his home in Vera Cruz, instead of taking us back by water to Panama."

This was a curious wager, and ordinarily the captain would have refused to make it, but he was under the stress of a great fear, which was intensifying every second.

"Yes, I'll take that bet, provided you start off at once, without waiting to gain another stroke on me."

"All right, here goes."

And the lad struck out with might and main for land.

The prize for which he was now striving was the most tempting that could be offered.

He and his uncle while making their way up the coast in the *Mary Ann,* had discussed an interesting fact, to the effect that the distance across the Peninsula of Mexico at this place was not great.

A journey of a week or two through one of the most romantic countries in the world was sufficient to take them to the city of Vera Cruz on the other side, where Alfiero had his home.

It was a fascinating idea of Jack that this trip ought to be made by him and his uncle and he had proposed it rather timidly.

The reception of the scheme was not very encouraging.

Now the chance was too good to be lost, and he strove with all his strength to win.

His friends were anxious that he should touch land ahead of them, though neither seriously considered at that time the consequences of his winning his wager.

It was the shark which the men feared above everything else, for, if he should happen to come up under the lad, or, for that matter, under either of the others, and open and shut those tremendous jaws of his, it would be the last of the poor swimmer.

"The water is so clear," said the captain to his brother, "that we can see him if he comes anywhere near us. Look sharp, Frede, for it won't do to let him get the start now."

"There he is!" gasped the man, who with the captain had purposely fallen a short distance behind the boy, striving with such desperate haste to reach land.

Captain Winch had caught sight of the horrid fin of the shark, as it slowly moved through the water between them and the boy.

The dreadful creature was making ready for his attack upon the party, which, it may be said, were at his mercy.

"Swim ahead, and make all the plashing you can, Frede, so as to keep the devil away from *him*. I'll stay here to fight him."

CHAPTER V

ON THE COAST

ALFREDO ALFIERO acted upon the suggestion of Captain Winch without a second's delay.

It would have been an easy matter for him to pass the boy, but such was not his desire, and he placed himself immediately in the rear of the little fellow, where he flung his arms and legs in such a furious fashion that he might have been taken for a ferry-boat, judging from the noise he made.

Jack concluded that his uncle was trying some new dodge on him, and he strove all the harder to get into land ahead of him.

A few yards behind them both floated Captain Winch, knife in hand, on the alert for the shark.

He had met the treacherous monsters of the deep, and he knew all about them. He possessed a certain confidence that he was a match for the particular specimen, and he was desirous that it should attack him, provided it singled out any one of the little company.

The wavering, hesitating manner in which the fin moved about on the surface of the water showed that

the dreaded creature was reconnoitring and making sure of the best point of assault.

The instant he should decide which was the vulnerable spot, that instant the fin would vanish.

The shark must get into deep water and beneath his victim before he can attack as he desires.

For some cause, he seemed to have his fancy fixed upon the man and lad ahead of him, and despite the gentle noise the captain made to attract his attention to himself, the shark hovered close to those ahead.

It might have been there was something in the plump, chubby appearance of the boy, which was more attractive than the tougher flesh of the men.

However, if such was the case, the captain was determined that the purpose of the ferocious creature should be changed.

With that object in view, he deliberately swam close up to it—so close, indeed, that he could have spat upon it, and then hovered around as if daring it to make an attack.

"Come, you old lubber, are you afraid of me, that you keep paddling about there on top of the water, instead—"

Just then the keen-eyed old sailor saw the fin as it whisked under the water, and he knew that it had started for some of them.

If for either Frede or Jack, he could select whichever he chose.

If for Captain Winch—well, there was some doubt about that.

All that the old sailor could do was to take it for granted that the shark was after him, and govern himself accordingly.

Understanding the nature of the fish as well as he did, the old sailor made a dive, intended to carry him below the enemy of them all.

When he had gone the distance he intended, he opened his eyes and looked around for his foe.

The captain had not miscalculated it.

There, in the clear glistening water, he saw moving slowly over his head the long, smooth body of the shark, which seemed to be wondering where in all creation its intended prey had gone.

Its wonderment did not last long, for the sailor made known where he was in a fashion too emphatic to be mistaken.

Shooting upward, as he often did when going up the rigging, he came directly under the belly of his foe, which was made aware of the location of his adversary by his knife.

The latter weapon was thrust with such force that it entered the body of the creature to the very hilt, and when the captain drew it forth there was such a spout of blood that he felt it over his arm and hand despite the water by which they were both enveloped.

The old sailor no sooner drew it forth, than he drove it in again with the same nervous vigor as before, and it did the most effective kind of execution.

He had about time to do this, when it was necessary for him to go to the surface to get a breath of air.

He was quite confident, however, that he had done enough to make the shark haul off for repairs, and so give the rest time to get beyond his reach.

The shark must have become conscious by this time that something serious was the matter with his internal arrangements, for he made a tremendous thrashing of the water for a moment or two, and then vanished like a streak of crimson light, and was seen no more.

The instant the captain came up, he caught his breath, and looked about to see whether there was the necessity for another dive to escape his enemy.

But the danger was past, and he swam more leisurely to shore, where the two men and his son were awaiting him.

Jack was dancing with delight, not knowing the real danger to which his father had been exposed.

"Hurrah! I've won the bet! I've won the bet!" he exclaimed.

"Of course I expected you to beat me," replied his parent, with an assumption of disappointment which he was far from feeling, "but I don't understand how it was you came in ahead of Frede, there."

"By swimming faster, that's how it was."

"Yes," added the uncle, with the same expression of chagrin, "Jack just let himself out and he touched shore when I was two yards behind him; he beat me fairly."

"If that's the case, then I'll have to pay the bet, if I'm able; let me see, what was it? A new rifle, horse, watch, or what?"

In the exciting circumstances under which the wager was made, the captain had not noticed its conditions, and he was really at sea, so far as its precise import was concerned.

But a boy never forgets such things, and the captain found, to his dismay, that he was pledged to permit his boy to make the journey overland to the gulf coast.

But the sturdy old salt was not the one to break a pledge, no matter how unpleasant the consequences might be.

While he was studying whether there was not some way in which his boy could be argued out of it, his brother said:

"Do you know that it is not very far from here to my home in Vera Cruz?"

"You must cross the continent to reach it," replied the captain.

"Precisely so, but the continent is very narrow at this part, and keeps on growing narrower as we go toward the isthmus."

"How far is it?" asked Jack, listening to the conversation with deep interest.

"As the crow flies it is scarcely four hundred miles."

"Let's go across the country to Vera Cruz then."

"There is a great deal of the roughest kind of traveling between the two coasts. There are mountains, rivers, deep streams, and dense forests, through which it will be not only difficult but dangerous to make our way."

This was said with the view of "scaring off" the boy, but, unfortunately for the success of the scheme, it only made him the more desirous of taking the journey.

"Won't that be splendid?" he exclaimed with a great sigh. "Oh, how I wish it could be done!"

It began to strike the uncle that there were many attractions in such an excursion, though he concealed the fact from the lad for the present, until he could find out how the father viewed the scheme.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Jack, going up to his parent, slipping his hand up in his face, and putting on that pleading expression which comes natural to a lad when he is anxious to secure some favor, "you can wait here till some boat comes along and takes you home again, and Uncle Frede and I will go across the country to Vera Cruz, and then go on down to Aspinwall and across to Panama. You know we

have each got a gun with us, and uncle has been here before, and there's no danger of getting lost, and there are ever so many towns and cities and villages and lovely places on the road, and, oh! it will be so splendid! Please, father, let us go."

"You little rascal, you don't know whether Frede wants to make the foolish trip or not. You had better wait and see what he thinks."

Uncle Frede said nothing, but gave his brother-in-law a significant look, and then walked away a few paces. The sailor obeyed the signal and followed the Mexican far enough to place the two beyond earshot of the lad.

"I know what that means," chuckled Jack. "They're going to talk the whole thing over between them, and they think I've no idea what they're driving at. Uncle Frede has made up his mind that the trip will be a splendid one, and he is trying to tell father that it is best to let me go with him, and he'll *do it too;* I've seen that thing worked before, when mother wanted to get him to do something for her. Mother's family must be smart, for she and Uncle Frede can always coax father to do anything they want him to—there, it's all fixed; I can tell by the way things look. Uncle Frede is trying to be solemn and cross, as though he hadn't got what he wanted, and father looks as if he would like to go along with us and have some fun."

Little Jack read the signs aright.

It was agreed that he and his uncle should start on foot across the country to Vera Cruz on the Gulf coast, taking their time and following their own inclinations as to halting, turning aside, or changing the route itself."

As Alfredo had said, there were extensive and deep forests, abounding with venomous reptiles, insects, and savage animals, where they were certain to run considerable danger; but the man was a skillful shot, he possessed the wealth to hire servants to accompany them, if they should decide they were needed, and as they proposed to cut across a portion of civilized Mexico, it was far different from the enterprise which contemplates the passing of some vast waste or desolation.

If the man and boy should become weary of the undertaking, they could turn aside, and in a short time reach some of the towns or cities which are quite numerous in that portion of Mexico.

And so the whole thing was fixed, and the arrangements completed before the sun went down in the Pacific.

Alfredo was convinced that he would secure a good, faithful attendant at the first opportunity—one who understood the country, and whose practical knowledge of the forests and solitudes was sufficient to take them from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

When and where such a desirable character was to be secured remained to be seen.

The start was to be on the morrow, the two heading directly into the interior, and pursuing a northeasterly course, which if persevered in was sure to bring them out in the picturesque town of Vera Cruz, all in due time.

It was no pleasant thing for Captain Winch to part with his only child in this fashion; but he saw that his heart was set upon going, and it was useless to attempt to argue him out of it, after his uncle had become his ally.

Such being the case, young Jack had nothing to do, but to fall back on his rights.

There could be no denying that he had won the wager, and when he insisted upon its payment the captain could only come down.

The afternoon was well advanced when they effected their landing on the Pacific coast, after their escape from the whale and shark, and it looked as if the whole party would have to stay where they were until morning.

There was nothing unpleasant in this prospect as the weather was so warm and there was such a fine breeze coming in from the sea, that their clothing speedily dried upon them, and there was no need of any sort of shelter for the night.

The country in which they found themselves was civilized enough to remove all fear of being disturbed

from any evil men, and as for wild animals, there was scarcely a thought of them.

The rifle of Jack and the one brought ashore by the sailor were found to be in perfect condition and Antonio was also thoughtful enough to secure some ammunition, so that the company were much better situated in this respect than they supposed themselves to be.

True, they had nothing to eat, but that was no very severe privation, as they had partaken of their usual dinner on board, and they could afford to go without their supper without complaining.

And so take it all in all, in view of the sad calamity that had overtaken their companions, they saw nothing in their situation excepting what called for the profoundest gratitude to God.

CHAPTER VI

A SHADOWY DANGER

From the time Captain Winch and his friends effected their landing on the coast, there was some kind of a sail in sight.

Far in the distance was seen the black line made by the smoke of a steamer against the sky, and, at varying distances, the cloud-like sails of ships were observed, as they sped on their way toward different points on the globe.

All appeared too far off, however, for the men to hope to attract their attention, though the captain was anxious to leave the place, if possible, that night.

The spot where the landing was made, we have said, was sandy, and contained nothing particularly attractive but a short distance inland was stunted undergrowth, where it seemed likely the captain could obtain that which he wanted.

Shortly after the landing, he accordingly dispatched the sailor to hunt for something in the nature of a pole.

Antonio was gone but a short time, when he returned with a long stick, which answered very well for what was needed.

The jacket of the captain was made fast to the top of this, and then a hole was scooped out in the sand, in which the base was placed and the dirt stamped down about it.

This done, the little company found they were provided with quite a respectable flag of distress.

While the relatives of Jack were arranging the all-important expedition in which he was to take part, Antonio, the sailor, was maintaining a sharp lookout for some friendly sail that would come to their relief.

He had gazed but a short time when his heart was thrilled with hope by the sight of a vessel which, proceeding southward as she was, veered about in her course and stood straight in toward land.

"Now we shall be taken off this barbarous coast," thought the delighted sailor, "and will soon be back in Panama."

But when his expectations were the highest, the ship fell off again and resumed her voyage toward the northwest, keeping it up until there was not the slightest possibitity of her coming to the assistance of the shipwrecked party.

Still the seaman, although greatly disappointed, did not give up the effort to attract the notice of some of the passing vessels.

While the men remained occupied in discussing their

important schemes he was engaged in running up and down the beach, and indulging in all sorts of antics to draw attention to him.

His persistency met its reward at last.

A small schooner not unlike the *Mary Ann* in build and appearance, and bound on her way toward Panama, was discovered standing in close to shore.

When nearly abreast of the sailor, she hove to and sent a small boat to land.

This settled the business, and the captain and his man immediately prepared to leave.

The schooner proved to be the *Dolphin,* on her way from San Francisco to Panama, so that nothing better could have been asked.

More than that, the commander, Captain Fairbanks, was an old friend of the captain of the lost *Mary Ann,* and he was sure to do all he could to welcome his unfortunate, or, rather, fortunate brother to his craft.

Captain Winch's heart almost deserted him when he came to bid good-by to his boy, and, but for his promise, he would have insisted that he should have accompanied him back to his home.

But Alfredo, who was a traveler of experience, convinced the parent that no serious danger threatened, and he would not be gone a long while.

Besides that, the lad had so set his heart upon it, that it seemed cruel to deprive him of the happiness which he believed awaited him

So the bronzed old sea captain kissed the little fellow several times, shook hands over and over again with him, and was scarcely less demonstrative with his brother, and then he stepped in the little boat awaiting him, waved another good-by from the back of the *Dolphin,* and soon after vanished from sight.

Alfredo was thoughtful enough to procure some provisions from the schooner so that they were furnished with all they needed for supper and breakfast by which time they calculated they would be able to look out for themselves.

They were the more confident of this in view of the fact that they had seized the same opportunity to replenish their supply of ammunition.

Take it all in all, they considered themselves in the best condition to stand a lively campaign.

The *Dolphin* had not yet faded out of sight, when the sun dropped down in the calm waters of the Pacific, and the two, man and child, realized that at last they were left alone.

"What do you say, my boy?" asked Alfredo, who was as full of delight as the lad at the prospect of the adventurous excursion before them. "Shall we have a fire to-night or not?"

"Is there to be a moon?"

"No moon, never a one."

"I don't see any wood about here; where shall we get it?"

"Over there," replied the uncle, pointing in the direction of the stunted undergrowth where Antonio had secured the staff for the flag of distress.

"Are there any wild animals there to gobble us up, if we go after wood?" asked Jack, gazing toward the dark line stretching away until walled in by the blackness of the mountains and night beyond.

"Haven't we each a gun and are you going to become so easily scared at the beginning?"

"Who said I was scared?" demanded the boy, springing to his feet and starting off in the direction of the wood.

His uncle followed after, laughing to himself, for he was quite sure that his assumption of courage was not genuine.

However, as there was no real peril, it answered as well as if it was the real stuff.

The walk through the sand was quite laborious, particularly when they came back loaded down with wood, like a couple of tramps pilfering from a hedge.

There was no necessity for the fire, as we have already remarked, but it was more pleasant to have it, when the darkness should settle upon the sea and land, and their faces should fade out from each other's sight.

There were no rocks against which they could place the sticks, and it was not necessary to have them.

At sunset the air was calm, the temperature of the sea and land being then in equipoise.

During the day, the water is the cooler and the breeze sets in toward shore to fill the vacuum caused by the ascending currents of heated atmosphere.

As the night advances the earth becomes cooler than the ocean, and a gentle, soothing wind blows from the land out to sea.

This breeze is always pleasant, and one of the greatest boons of a sojourn at the seaside during the heated term.

Consequently, as the man and boy were situated, a rock would have helped to rob them of this pleasure.

So they scooped out a place in the sand, large enough to contain both comfortably, the displaced grains being thrown up in a ridge on the outside, so as to form a kind of embankment.

In the opposite end of this place, another spot was hollowed out, in which they made their fire.

This done, they voted that they were as finely situated as if under their own vine and fig tree at home.

After supper the two remained talking awhile, until the boy became sleepy and his head drooped forward.

Then his uncle ceased and allowed him to sink into that sweet, dreamless slumber which belongs more to childhood than to any other period of life.

Alfredo waited until he was sure he was uncon-

scious when he made his position as comfortable as he could, and then the man, rifle in hand, stepped over the shallow embankment and walked off in the direction of the beach.

He was smoking a cigarette, obtained from the *Dolphin,* and he was desirous of taking a look around before stretching out for the night—not that he had the least thought of danger, but because he was not disposed to slumber just yet.

Looking off to sea, he could see nothing in the darkness that could cause any alarm, though there was a feeling strong upon him to-night which caused him some uneasiness, and for which he could not account. He recalled that he and his young companion had been wonderfully favored and protected by Providence, when placed in the gravest sort of peril, and it seemed wrong and ungrateful for him to give away to anything like doubt at this time, when there was no tangible evidence of any danger impending.

"So it is always," he murmured, as he paused and puffed the fragrant tobacco, "we are always fancying some trouble is close at hand, instead of contenting ourselves with the safety of the present. I ought to be ashamed of myself."

All that might be so, and yet it did not remove the fact that he was in an uncomfortable frame of mind, which was steadily increasing instead of diminishing.

What made it worse was the recollection that in more than one instance of his extensive travels he had been disturbed in the same way, and he could recall none in which subsequent events did not prove that his fears were more than justified.

"I hope nothing will happen to *him*," he added, gazing in the direction of the camp, where the remains of the camp-fire feebly glowed through the darkness.

"It was I who convinced the captain that he would do wise to allow Jack to accompany me on this excursion into the interior, and if ill should befall him, *I* would be the one to hold responsible."

Here and there, far out on the Pacific, could be detected small twinkling points of light, moving slowly along the surface, appearing in the distance like stars of the night.

But he knew they were the lights upon the decks or at the masts of some vessels on their way to their destinations in different parts of the globe.

Thus he stood for half an hour, until he had smoked several of the twists of havana when he turned about and started to return to camp. There was still no moon, and he could distinguish nothing at any distance off.

But for the dull glow from the sand behind him, he would have had some trouble to find the camp where the lad was sleeping so sweetly, with no thought of possible danger threatening him.

Alfredo had retraced something like half his steps, when his listening ears were arrested by the sound of something sounding like the dip of an oar in the water.

If such was the fact it was at no great distance and he paused and looked off in the gloom toward the point whence seemed to come the noise.

The darkness prevented him seeing anything and he heard no more.

"I could not have been mistaken," he said to himself, "for I was not expecting anything, and the sound was so distinct that it could have been nothing else."

After waiting where he was for a few minutes longer, he concluded to walk down the beach in the direction whence came the noise which had caused, or rather increased, his uneasiness.

He walked quietly and smoothly over the shingle until he found himself close to the beach where the swells came up at intervals and rolled over upon the sand with that peculiar heavy booming sound which belongs to the ocean. Still he heard nothing more, nor could he detect anything that explained what it was that had disturbed him. At last he gave it up and started once more on his return.

"It must have been some piece of wood thrown up by the waves which made the peculiar sound," he concluded, after stopping several times on the way to listen.

Little Jack was sleeping as soundly as when he left him, and after waiting awhile longer, his uncle lay down and joined the lad in the land of dreams.

Well would it have been had he remained awake a short time longer.

CHAPTER VII

THIEVES OF THE NIGHT

When Alfredo lay down on the sand to sleep, he was quite weary from the fatigue of swimming so long and hard in the sea and his slumber, as a consequence, became very profound.

Although his suspicions had been excited by that strange feeling which came over him as he walked upon the beach, deepened, too, by the single sound of an oar that reached him through the night, yet with the closing of his eyes all fancies of danger went from his brain, and he slept as sweetly as when he swung in his hammock on board the *Mary Ann*.

The noise which he heard, and which he supposed was that of an oar, was that, and nothing else.

When making his search along the beach he would have discovered the cause, had he advanced a short distance further.

With the darkness there came creeping downward from the north a small boat, containing two men, and carrying a single sail.

They kept some distance off shore, and were propelled by the breeze, which had begun to go out gently to the sea.

They would have attracted no special attention when viewed from land, as such craft are met with in every part of the world.

But when the night was fairly descended they came still closer to shore, and finally turning square to the left, ran the prow of their boat as high up the beach as the momentum was sufficient to impel it.

This done, one of them partly pried the craft into a slightly different position making the noise which alarmed Alfredo while thus engaged.

The occupants of this strange craft were Mexicans, who, viewed under the light of the sun, were as villainous a couple as could well be met with in a day's journey.

Of shabby appearance, with long, black, heavy beards, straggling about their swarthy faces, broad shoulders, with keen, black, piercing eyes, there was that in their looks and make-up which would have caused mistrust wherever encountered.

However, the night was so dark that there was no likelihood of their being subjected to any such scrutiny, and they acted as if they already felt they were masters of the situation.

To avoid all mystery, we may say that their errand on the coast, at this particular time, was to rob the man and boy asleep on the beach.

They had kept so far north and off shore during the

afternoon, that they were not noticed by any of those who effected the landing from the *Mary Ann,* but, carrying a heavy glass themselves, they maintained microscopic watch of the movements of the others.

They saw that there were but the single man and boy left, and they concluded that the chance was a good one for plunder.

Fully armed as were these two thieves, they might be able to hold their own in case of resistance, while if their victims should number any more, the danger of attack would be too great.

The robbers, like most of their class, were arrant cowards, and they had no disposition to molest unless the chances were all in their favor.

And so it was that, instead of coming out boldly and making for the man and boy, who could not be said to equal them in strength, they preferred to wait until they were asleep.

The scamps were accustomed to this sort of business, and they rightly concluded that their intended victims would not remain awake a long time after the descent of the sun.

They had made up their minds to commit this outrage, and in case the sleepers should arouse and attempt to defend themselves, they were ready on the instant to cut their throats, as they had undoubtedly done under similar circumstances before to-night.

The first thing necessary was to ascertain whether the man was unconscious, for the boy need not enter into their consideration; and with this purpose in view, one of the villains leaped lightly down from the gunwale of his boat, and began making his way to where the dull glow showed the camp-fire was smouldering.

He moved with the silence and stealth of a shadow, showing that he was accustomed to that sort of business.

When he drew near enough to catch the faintest possible glimpse through the darkness he paused a full minute, looking toward the light and listening.

Nothing rewarding this close attention, he sank down on his hands and knees and began creeping toward the spot like a Comanche warrior stealing into the camp of his enemy.

The wretch was fully armed and prepared for any sort of reverse; but when he reached the edge of the small embankment and peered over, he became convinced that the man was never in a sounder sleep in all his life.

Thereupon the villain began a cautious withdrawal, until he was a rod or two distant, when he turned his head and made a cautious whistle, so low indeed that no ear, unless it was listening, would have noticed it.

But the villain for whom it was intended *was* listening, a short distance off, and he immediately started

from the side of his craft toward the point whence came the signal. Then, when the confederates in crime came together, they sat for a time on the sand, engaged in a sort of consultation.

They spoke in a broken Spanish jargon, and in voices so low that they would not have been heard a dozen rods away.

There was no difficulty in arranging their scheme, as it was so simple in outline and detail.

As soon as the time should arrive, they proposed to creep up to the camp, and to "go through" the man and boy.

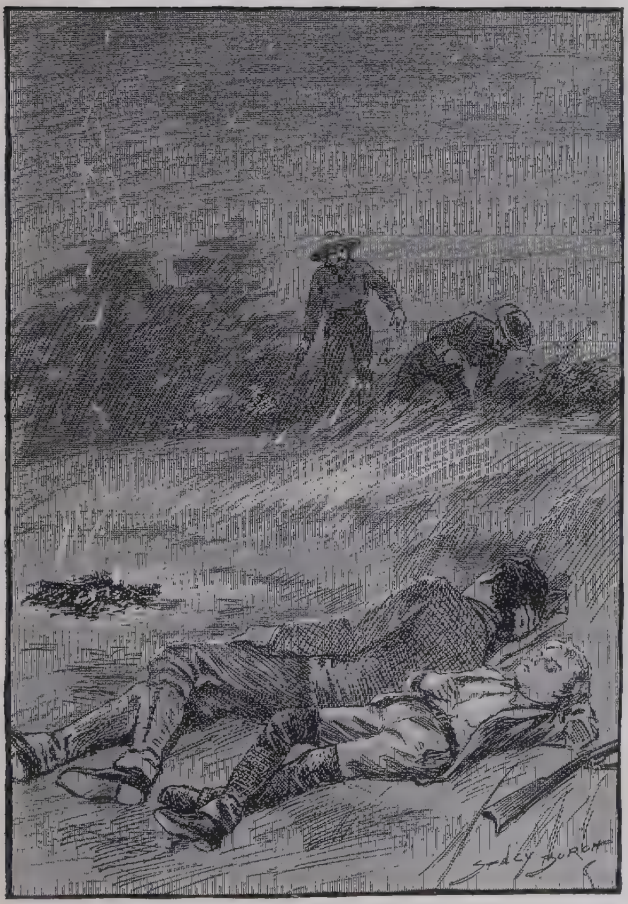
If either or both should awake during this interesting process so much the worse for them!

Such desperadoes always went prepared for such emergencies.

Such scamps, too, are provided with a certain amount of stoical patience which enables them to wait until the right moment, without the chafing and discomfort shown by more impetuous spirits.

There was scarcely a moment from the time the men seated themselves on the sand close to the beach when it would not have been safe for them to go forward and carry out their iniquitous designs.

But in accordance with a certain system which seems to govern such outlaws, they never stirred from where they were sitting until a full hour had passed.



"THERE WAS JUST ENOUGH LIGHT FROM THE FEW SMOULDERING EMBERS TO SHOW THE PRECISE POSTURE OF THEIR VICTIMS." —PAGE 61.

They spoke very rarely, and then in the same cautious, guarded tones.

Finally the hour came for them to move.

By a common impulse, they turned about and began creeping toward the camp where lay the unsuspecting sleepers.

When they were within a few feet, there came another waiting and listening and looking.

All seemed satisfactory, and then they separated, one of the Mexicans moving around to the right, and the other to the left.

They so timed their movements that they came to the embankments at the same moment.

There was just enough light from the few smouldering embers to show the precise posture of their victims, and the moment after, both of the robbers were at work.

They were evidently professionals, and they did what they undertook with amazing thoroughness.

While one " went through " the man, the other took the boy in hand.

Both Jack and his uncle carried a handsome gold watch and chain.

These were the first plunder that went into the possession of the robbers.

Then Alfredo, as was his custom, carried a wallet containing a large sum of money, which reposed within an inner pocket of his coat, over his breast.

To reach this it was necessary to unbutton his coat, and then to go through a very delicate operation of thrusting the hand underneath, where it required but a slight disturbance to awake the sleeper.

If anyone was equal to the emergency, the man who was trying it was, but he was not.

His friend, before this point was reached, had completed his work, so far as the boy was concerned.

There was no difficulty in taking anything they chose from Jack Winch, who would not have opened his eyes had they proceeded to rob him of all his garments.

In the present instance, the outlaw took the watch only from his person, that being about all there was, or at least, all that he cared to carry off as a memento.

But when the thief had stowed this valuable relic in one of his capacious pockets, and was in the act of withdrawing to place himself closer to his confederate, so as to render him assistance if necessary, his hand came in contact with the small rifle of Jack.

This weapon was a handsome one, ornamented with silver, and of a size and weight to accommodate the years of the boy, and of course, under the present circumstances, it was well-nigh indispensable to him.

At any rate, the instant the hand of the robber touched it, he felt that it would not do to permit such a prize to escape him.

So he drew it from the place where it was nestling beside the owner.

Having deposited it behind him on the sand where he could lay his hand on it any instant, he moved stealthily over to where his comrade was at work to see whether he was needed to assist in the robbery of the more dangerous victim.

The second villain was at that moment, insinuating his raven-like fingers into the inner breast-pocket of Alfredo.

He had already explored several others, and this being about the last, he was confident of finding that which he wanted.

He had shoved the long fingers but a short way when they touched something that he knew to be the wallet with its gold.

At this instant his companion appeared at his side.

It was a most critical juncture and the robber was fearful that his pal would interfere.

So, instead of speaking, the robber turned his head and shook it.

Dark as it was, they were that close that they could see each other, and the signal was observed and understood.

The new-comer shrank back so as to leave the other free to complete his villainous work.

Softly, slowly and evenly as the hand steals over the face of the clock did the fingers of the thief creep along the plump wallet reposing in the pocket of the sleeping Alfredo.

Only an atom at a time did it move, while the heart of the scamp must have throbbed with expectation as he noted the unusually large dimensions and corpulent condition of the depository of the wealth of his victim.

He knew there must be a large sum of money there—larger than he had ever made during any of the similar expeditions upon which he and his pal had been engaged for years past.

An inch further his fingers crept, and when he was expecting them to meet around the opposite end of the wallet they still made their way along the sides of the same.

All this was conclusive as to the wealth of the owner of the pocket, but it indicated, too, the difficulty the robber was sure to encounter in attempting to withdraw it.

The removal of such a large object from where it was resting on the breast of a sleeping man is always pretty sure to awake him, unless he is a sound sleeper.

No one could understand the matter better than the Mexican engaged in robbing Alfredo.

The only way by which he hoped to escape alarming him was by drawing the wallet so very slowly and evenly, that if the man awoke, the robber would only have to cease for the time for him to drop to sleep again.

Why not draw it forth with a single quick movement?

Such would be the question that would have presented itself to a spectator could there have been one.

But these professionals have a way of doing such things which is often a puzzle to outsiders.

The plan mentioned could have been carried out without the least difficulty promising two clear avenues out of the difficulty.

If the scamps were afraid, they could easily spring up and make off with their booty in the darkness.

If they chose more violent means, it was at their command at the very instant the victim should give the first intimation of waking.

For that matter, there was no need of waiting for that, even.

A single blow on the head of the slumbering Alfredo Alfiero would place him out of the way forever, without any punishment therefor from human hands.

CHAPTER VIII

A STARTLING ROBBERY

THE robber who was engaged in taking the wallet of Alfredo from his pocket, we say, was not equal to the task of doing so without awaking him.

The thief was almost at the point of closing his hand in such a way that the prize would be his beyond peradventure, when the sleeping man stirred, and the robber paused and held himself ready to strike.

The movement amounted to nothing, however, and the sleeper quickly settled into quiescence again.

The next minute the thief felt his fingers meeting around the further end of the wallet, when his victim awoke!

"Hello! what's the matter here?" he exclaimed, raising his head, and clutching at the hand in his pocket.

Had the man been given the least chance he would have made things hot for the robbers, but he was caught at the worst disadvantage imaginable.

"Thieves, eh? That is the way——"

He was in the act of springing to his feet when he was struck a violent blow upon the head with the butt of a pistol, the shock causing him to drop backward.

Still he would have rallied had he possessed a minute in which to do so, but his enemies were too wise to allow anything of the kind.

Another cracking blow on his head, and he dropped back again, this time with his senses clean gone.

"I guess he's done for," said the man who had struck the two blows, as he leaned over him.

"Better give him another, so as to make sure," added his companion, groping about in the darkness for the rifle that he had laid aside; "if you don't there's no telling where he'll turn up again."

The scamp was on the point of doing so, but did not, restraining himself through no sentiment of mercy.

He judged that the gentleman was dead, and if he was not, it was a small matter, for he did not feel that anything was to be apprehended from the utmost he could do.

There were no human witnesses to the tragedy, and in such a broken, poorly-governed country as Mexico, the criminals might well repose in peace, so far as any fear from the arm of the authorities was concerned.

So the blow was not repeated.

The robbers had secured the two gold watches, the small rifle of the boy, and the well-filled wallet of the man.

The raid had been of the most successful character, and they ought to have gone away fully satisfied.

Alfredo fell back like a dead man, and lay thus when his foes took their departure.

But he was far from dead, and in the course of an hour his senses began to come back to him.

The first intimation of what had taken place was the sensation of pain in the head, a sharp, stinging twinge, which so often follows a violent blow upon the skull.

When he rose to the sitting position, the suffering was so great that he was compelled to lie down again until he could gain more strength.

"I'd like to know what the matter is with me" he said, pressing his hand to his forehead. "It can't be that it was I that the whale ran into instead of the *Mary Ann,* though I feel about as that schooner must have felt, had it been gifted with sensation. Whew! but I wonder if my skull is cracked! Queer, I can't remember anything about it; let me see—I was asleep—had lain down with Jack when I woke up with some one fooling about my breast-pocket——"

With this recollection, he suddenly clapped his hand to where his money ought to have been.

"It's gone!" he gasped—"I have been robbed."

As is generally the case he searched every pocket again and again, and groped around in the darkness, thinking, possibly, that it had worked out of his possession during some involuntary movement of sleep.

But, of course he found it not.

The robbery was established by indubitable proof.

By the time this point was reached, Alfredo was able to recall that scene where he was awakened by feeling some one searching his pocket, followed by the two blows which stretched him senseless on the earth, where he must have been left when the robbers went away.

"I don't understand why they did not finish me while they were about it," he muttered, as he sat down to recall the circumstance. "That is the style in which they generally do such things. I wonder whether Jack was awakened during the tumult? Of course not," he instantly added, answering his own question.

There were a few embers of the camp-fire, but he was afraid to disturb them, lest his enemies should be watching somewhere in the immediate neighborhood.

"I think I'll take a look around," he said to himself, reaching out and picking up his rifle, which he made sure was loaded.

The sound of the surf, booming at intervals, was his compass, as he stepped softly from within the embankment, and recalling the point whence came the sound that had deepened his suspicions earlier in the evening, he turned his steps in that direction.

"It's strange how Providence warns us of danger," he reflected, while walking along in his cautious manner. "I have had a number of experiences like this last night, and they have never yet failed to mean some-

thing. The mistake I made was in permitting myself to go to sleep as I did. I ought to have mounted guard, and I would have been sure of defeating their designs."

He was now close to the spot where he stood earlier in the night, when the sound of the oar reached his ear.

"It must have been right here—strange!"

Strange indeed it was, for while the thought was passing through his mind he heard again precisely the same noise.

He determined to know what it meant; and hurried off toward the point whence it came, without pausing to hush the noise of his feet on the sand.

A dizziness flashed upon him now and then, causing him to stagger, but he kept along with a pretty regular gait until he was close to the water's edge again.

He was just in time to catch a glimpse of the boat of which we have made mention, as it put out to sea.

Its shabby sail was up, and as there was a cool, steady breeze setting out to sea, the two Mexicans seemed to have no trouble in launching it into the ocean, and in directing it after it was started.

"There go the thieves," said Alfredo to himself, peering after the boat as it rapidly faded from view in the gloom. "I only wish I could catch sight of the villain who gave me that blow. It should be the last of that business for him."

Such a wish was honorable, and natural, perhaps, but

it could amount to nothing, and while it was in the mouth of the speaker, the boat and its occupants disappeared from view.

The watcher waited where he was awhile, during which he bathed his aching head, and recovered in a great degree from the shock of the blow that had robbed him of his senses, and nearly of his life.

At last, when the night was pretty well gone, he started back to camp again, hoping that he would be all right in the morning.

"They have my watch and wallet," he said to himself, "which don't leave me in the best condition in the world, though it might have been worse. If they had taken my gun I would have had no choice but to seek passage back to Panama, and Jack would have seen the end of his expedition before it began. Poor fellow! he is sleeping like a top."

He listened, and was a little surprised that in the deep silence, broken only by the long boom of the ocean, he could hear nothing of the boy's breathing.

This might be the case and all be right, but he had slept alongside his young friend so often that he knew his peculiarities, one of which was that his regular breathing always betrayed itself to any one as close as he was at that moment.

An awful fear came over Alfredo.

"Can it be that he is dead?" he gasped. "Are there

two fiends who would slay an innocent boy like him for nothing at all?"

For a moment or two he was paralyzed at the thought, not daring to make sure of the truth.

Finally he roused himself and crept over to the other side of the embankment, where he moved his hands around in quest of his young friend.

Here, there, everywhere they passed, but they encountered nothing in the shape of a sleeping boy!

"As sure as heaven he is gone!" exclaimed the uncle, in terror, when he had made the search so thorough that there could be no possibility of mistake.

He was not within the embankment, that was certain, nor was he in the immediate neighborhood.

Thinking it barely possible that he was walking in his sleep, he listened for the sound of his footsteps, but there were none.

Then he made a more extended search, which was as fruitless of results. Then he called to him again and again, until his voice must have penetrated a long distance on the still Summer night.

All these resources having failed to bring any intelligence of the boy, Alfredo resorted to the only thing he could do.

That was to continue groping around in the gloom, calling his name, and waiting for the light of morning to tell where he was.

He would not allow himself to believe that the villains had taken Jack away, though that was the first conclusion on making the discovery that he was absent.

He was in the midst of his hunt, when the light in the east told him that the night was at an end, and he would soon have the sunlight to assist him in the search.

Perching himself on the highest bank of sand within reach, he watched the growing light with an intensity of interest hard to imagine.

As the sun mounted higher and higher in the heavens, his eyes roamed up and down the beach in quest of some sign of the boy, or of something which would tell what had become of him.

His heart stood still for an instant, as a small dark object was discerned on the beach, which he was sure was the lad stretched out on his face.

He could even see his arm gathered under his head, as was a favorite practice with Jack.

" They have carried him off and after drowning him, he has been washed up on the beach," said Alfredo, as he sprang to his feet and started on a run toward the point.

He had not a particle of doubt on this point, as he hastened thither, and yet, on reaching the spot, he found that, instead of being Jack Winch, it was nothing but a piece of drift-wood.

The relief was so great that Alfredo laughed outright, and looking down at the object, wondered how it was that he could have made such a ridiculous blunder.

However, that being clearly established, the question came back as to where Jack was.

But one conclusion could be reached, and that was that he had been carried away by the robbers, who had gone off with the wallet and watch of Alfredo.

This point was quite clearly established by the shape which the investigation took.

Examining the ground close to the encampment, the man had no difficulty in distinguishing the footprints of the two villains who had visited it during the darkness a few hours before.

He saw where one had stooped over and robbed Jack as well as himself and then by the use of a little judgment, Alfredo established the fact that the boy had been carried away.

In the first place though a number of footprints were visible, there were none of the boy leading *away* from where he had lain down.

Following the trail of the two men toward the beach, the spot was reached where their boat had been drawn up on the sand, and here was the evidence that they had lain the little fellow down for a moment while making ready to shove off into the sea.

The signs were so plain that there could be no mistake, and Alfredo gazed off to sea, in vain quest of the craft that had stolen his companion from him.

What should he do?

Alas! he did not see that he could do anything.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE LION'S DEN

"WELL now, that's mighty queer," said Jack Winch, when he opened his eyes and looked about him. "I'm sure I went to sleep on the sand with Uncle Frede sitting just opposite, and how did I come to be here?"

The sun was shining, and the day was well advanced as the boy knew from the light which filled the small apartment in which he found himself.

Everything conspired to mystify the boy.

He was well satisfied that he "retired" in the place and with the surroundings already explained and after sinking into unconsciousness he awoke in a spot as different as could be.

He was in a small room which was plainly the cabin of a small boat, the roof of which was so close that he could touch it with his hand as he lay upon his back.

Turning his head, so as to gain a view of his surroundings, Jack Winch observed that he was stretched upon a hammock, which was the most untidy he had ever seen in all his life.

The room, as we have said, was small, containing little besides the two hammocks slung opposite each

other, while some ragged clothing was hung upon pegs over the head, the distance being so short that the larger portion of the suspended clothing rested upon the beds.

An old sea-chest lay lengthwise between the hammocks, so that to enter one of them a person could use the trunk as a stepping-stone.

There was nothing like a window to this prison-like cell, but the door communicating with the deck was partly open, admitting enough sunlight to illuminate the interior.

As Jack collected his senses and studied the situation, he became convinced that he was not only in a small boat but that it was not upon the ocean.

He judged the latter to be the fact from the perfect calmness of the craft.

There was no sound of waves, nor was there that long heaving swell which is a peculiarity of the Pacific Ocean at all times.

The conclusion therefore, was that the vessel was lying up some small bay or inlet of the sea, where it was insensible to the never-ceasing "pulse" of the deep.

In these surmises the boy was undoubtedly right, and it was his training under his father that enabled him to form conclusions which might have escaped older heads.

This much understood, the racking mystery remained:

"How did I come here?"

It would be hardly worth our while to give the theories which ran through the brain of Jack as he tried to answer the question.

He thought he had been carried off by kidnappers, or that he had wandered away in his sleep and had been picked up by friends or enemies as the case might be.

He settled down finally to the belief that he had been placed there either by his father or uncle.

He remembered the hesitation and unwillingness with which the captain consented to allow him to go on the expedition and it struck him as likely that his parent had repented and come back after him while he slept

But there was an improbability after all, about such a proceeding which prevented his accepting it as the most likely one.

It seemed more reasonable that his uncle had played a little joke on him, as he was fond of doing.

It might be that he had arranged for this exploring tour before they left Panama, with his guide engaged.

"I don't s'pose he had the whale fixed too," said Jack to himself, pursuing his train of thought, "but that might have been an accident just the same. And

then while I was asleep, they have picked me up and carried me aboard. Hello, there's my gun!" he added, as he espied the weapon leaning against the foot of the hammock.

It was quite an ingenious theory which the boy formed, and did not do him discredit.

And yet, in spite of all these surmises, there remained just enough doubt and mistrust to make him uneasy, and to cause him to long for a solution of the perplexing problem.

He lay still, listening for footsteps or voices.

The tomb could not have been more oppressively quiet than was everything around him.

All that he heard was the faint, soft wash of the tiny ripples against the side of the boat.

There was nothing else to give him the least clue as to his whereabouts or his surroundings.

The temptation was great for him to rise from the hammock and go on deck, but he was afraid of offending somebody.

Jack concluded that the forenoon was about half gone, though it was entirely guess-work on his part.

The most that he dare do was to turn on his side and look around the cabin, but he had already seen all there was of interest, and what he wanted to gaze upon now was that which was over his head on the deck.

As the minutes passed away without bringing sight

or sound of anything strange, his courage gradually increased until he ventured to rise and sit on the edge of the bed.

This caused no noise, and he was sure that if he heard any one coming he could flop back again into the hammock before being discovered.

This proceeding was quite an advance, but after all it did not extend his knowledge in the desired direction.

He knew no more than in the first place.

If he meant to enlighten himself, he must do more than this.

That was what Jack was after, and it was not long before he rose timidly to his feet and started toward the door.

No sooner had he taken the first step than he darted back again.

He hadn't heard anything, but it suddenly occurred to him that he was making a fatal mistake.

But a few minutes' rest, caused him to change his mind again, and he made a second venture.

It was only a few steps to the door, and the shortest ascent was all he needed to carry him to the deck above.

The heart of the lad throbbed painfully when he reached the stair, where he paused for several minutes before he could summon courage enough to attempt the ascent.

But the prolonged and profound silence proved that there was no one on deck, or else those who were there were asleep.

In either case the boy had not attempted a very perilous feat.

But a lad placed in his position fancies all sorts of things, and he believed at times that the men were waiting with guns to blow his head off the moment he showed it above deck.

Finally, after many and long pauses, he pushed his eyes so far upward that he could use them to some purpose.

He saw that the boat was lying against the bank of a small bayou or inlet, where there were plenty of trees which overhung the craft.

The stream, or whatever it should be termed, was no more than a hundred yards wide, both sides being equally wooded.

It appeared to be composed of deep water, which, as we have said, was so calm that it felt not the least throb from the ocean.

Besides this, the craft was moored at a winding portion of the stream, so that the boy could not see very far up or down—certainly not far enough to learn anything more than has already been told.

There was the wooded shore on one side, and the wooded shore on the other, with the water vanishing

from sight both above and below, by reason of its winding course.

Listening with all his senses on the alert, he was sensible of the dull boom and roar of the ocean.

It seemed to be to the left, but it must be quite a ways off, judging from the faintness of the noise which reached him.

Jack dared not as yet venture to place his feet on deck, contenting himself with standing on tip-toe on the steps and peering over the low gunwale.

Very likely in a few minutes more he would have ventured above, had he not been frightened almost out of his shoes by hearing the dip of paddles and the sound of human voices.

He did not take time to look to see what the direction was, but stepping back upon the floor, he hurried back to the hammock, as if he had committed an unpardonable sin in leaving it without permssion.

If Jack was frightened by these signs of the approach of some one, his fright amounted to pitiable terror when he found that he had sprung so heavily upon the hammock that the fastenings gave way, and he went down to the floor with a shock that seemed to him like an earthquake.

What could he do?

Nothing, of course; if he had the time he had not the ability to readjust the hammock as it was, and so he sat down upon the ruins and waited for his fate.

In a short time the sound of the paddles came more plainly than before to him, showing that the boat was approaching the vessel containing him.

He could not hear anything more of the voices, though he once detected something which sounded wonderfully like a laugh to him.

Only a few minutes were needed to bring the craft alongside the larger one, but, judging from the noise, Jack knew that it had passed by, and the prow run against the bank.

But the occupants were after the larger vessel, and almost immediately the heavy footsteps were heard on the deck above.

There was some talking and walking to and fro, and then a pair of heavy boots appeared at the head of the gangway, and straightway began to descend into the cabin.

They came down very deliberately, the stairs being almost perpendicular, and so narrow that a full-grown man needed to use some caution in making his way down them.

The boots reached far above the knees, and then there was a large installment of breeches, coat, waist and shoulders, and at last the shaggy countenance of the Mexican appeared to sight.

The first intention of Jack was to feign sleep, but the broken hammock would have exposed the fraud,

and he therefore sat resolutely on the margin of the smashed couch, and looking toward the man, bowed pleasantly as their eyes met.

The heavily bearded face, with its forbidding expression, has been referred to in another place, and it cannot be said that the boy was very delighted with what he saw.

As for the Mexican, he did not return the salutation, but stared at the boy an instant, and then uttered an exclamation of surprise, caused no doubt by the collapsed hammock.

The exclamation was so loud that it brought his companion to the cabin, and Jack Winch was given a fair view of his masters or abductors.

As the bed seemed to cause them more concern than their prisoner, the latter rose and shoved himself as far back as he could, so as to give them a chance to repair it if they wished to do so.

This suited, and they set about it immediately, acting as if no one else was present.

The labor was not very great.

All they had to do was to tie some more ropes and cords, and the thing was done.

While they were thus engaged, their tongues were busy, and Jack observed that the jargon was a nigh enough approach to Spanish for him to catch the meaning of the words.

"Now I will try and be more careful," said he, when they stepped back from their work.

"You will stay here," said the Mexican who was the first to enter the cabin. "Don't you go away without we let you; if you try to do so, *we will kill you.*"

The language in which this was uttered was broken, but the meaning was unmistakable.

The manner was savage, and the snaky eyes of the outlaw seemed to scintillate fire upon the cowering lad, who had made up his mind by this time that he was in the lion's den.

Poor Jack nodded his head a number of times to signify that he took in the command, and meant to obey it to the very letter.

At the same time he indulged in the mental reservation that he would seize the first opportunity to escape that came in his way.

The Mexican waited until he felt that he was comprehended, and had made an "impression" when he withdrew.

His companion had preceded him in going on deck.

Once more little Jack Winch was left alone.

CHAPTER X

ON THE BRINK OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE

THE action of the two Mexican outlaws that had captured Jack Winch satisfied him that they were the worst enemies he could have in all the world.

He took scarcely time to conjecture how it was they had secured possession of him when he was in the custody of his Uncle Frede, who had traveled in so many parts of the world, and had encountered so many of the evil classes, that he ought to have provided against such a calamity as this.

Jack, we say, did not take much time to consider this phase of the question, for his head was occupied with devising some means of getting away from them.

"They told me if I tried to leave here, or to go on deck, they would kill me, and I've no doubt they would; but, for all that, I'm going to run away the first chance I see."

The trouble was, the boy could not see how the opportunity was to come to him.

After their orders to him, he heard them walk along the deck and descend into the smaller boat.

Immediately came the sound of their oars again, and he knew they were pulling away.

"They're doing that to try me," was his conclusion, "but they ain't going to catch me *that* way. I s'pose they will hide somewhere, and keep watch. Like enough, too, they would let me have a good start, and then slip up and shoot me. Well, there!" he added, in some excitement, "they have left my rifle behind, as though they forgot it. I wonder whether they really did forget it, or whether that is a part of the same trick? I'll see whether it's loaded, anyway."

A brief examination showed that the charge was in it, just the same as on the night before, when he lay down to sleep, with no thought of harm or disturbance from any one.

The presence of the loaded gun gave a confidence to the boy such as he had not felt before, and at the same time it opened a dozen wild schemes of escape.

It would be impossible to name one-half of the Quixotic ideas that flitted through his brain, the most of which were dismissed almost as soon as formed.

The one which he favored most was to shoot the first man that appeared, hoping that in the confusion he would be able to load up again before the second could do him harm.

But sober second-thought convinced Jack that his plan was impracticable.

The greatest objection was that he had no ammunition in his possession, his Uncle Frede having charge of that part of their outfit.

If he could have laid hands on two such weapons, ready charged, he would have made the attempt, and possibly might have succeeded, though there were difficulties in the way which he could not foresee.

He set the gun in place where it stood, before picking it up, and taking his seat on the hammock again, tried hard to conjure up some other plan of baffling the villains who held him at their mercy.

As was always his custom, he asked Heaven to direct him in the great dilemma, for he had learned, at his mother's knee, that that source of help is the only one that never fails.

The result of this long conference with himself was the eminently wise conclusion that the safer course was to wait till Providence should indicate the way.

"I wish they would give me something to eat," he said, gazing wistfully around the small cabin for food.

As mere looking would not bring forth the nourishment, he instituted a search, but the issue was a failure.

He was unable to find so much as a fragment, and he made up his mind to bear his hunger as became a young hero, such as he meant to be.

"I don't believe they want to starve me to death, and if they do, it will take a longer time than to-day to do it."

It was hard to confine himself in the narrow little apartment, as he had been told he must do; but he

thought he could stand it for a while, and the night was likely to bring the chance for which he was longing so earnestly.

Fortunately for Jack, as the hours wore away, he fell into a sleep again, which lasted until the day was well gone.

This not only made the time seem much shorter than otherwise would have been the case, but it fitted him for the wakeful hours that were likely to become necessary, in case he should make the attempt to steal away from his abductors.

Probably he would not have awakened at the time he did but for the confusion on deck.

He heard the sounds of feet moving to and fro, and knew from the way the water was dashing against the sides of the craft that a breeze was blowing.

What the confusion meant he was unable to tell for awhile, but at last he found the men were putting up the sail.

This indicated, of course, a change of location, and the wonder at once was as to where they intended to go.

"Maybe they are putting out to sea, and if Uncle Frede means to do anything for me," he thought, "it is time he was at it."

Luckily for his peace of mind, Jack did not believe that any trouble had befallen his relative.

A few moments later, the boat began moving slowly through the water, and the noise on deck ceased.

The vessel was under way, and there was little work necessary to keep the craft in the stream.

The boy supposed that the men had been in the cabin while he was asleep, though he could not see any evidences of their visit that they had left behind them.

He was reclining on the hammock, with that yearning for motion and exercise which always comes over an active person when compelled to be quiescent.

But he dare not stir, or at least to leave the cabin, when he was aroused by the appearance of one of the heavily-bearded men coming down to call on him.

The visit was a most welcome one, as the outlaw bore in his hand a portion of a cooked fish, which he threw to the boy, pointing at the same time to a jug of water which sat on the floor at his feet.

The man, having done this, withdrew again without a word, though Jack returned thanks for his consideration.

"That suits me," said the boy, as he proceeded to place himself outside the nourishment, "and there is enough here to keep me going for another day, any way."

Had there been a window, he would have ventured to peep out to learn the direction they were following; but, as that was impossible, he could only conclude

from the fact that the bow of the craft was pointing up stream when he made his observation, and he had failed to notice anything like a turning at the time of starting, that they were making their way up stream.

Such was the fact, and after a voyage lasting an hour or so, the sounds above told him that they were mooring fast to the shore again.

The noise of limbs sweeping over the deck proved that they were a good ways from the ocean.

By the time the boat was made fast, the sun must have set, for Jack noticed the increasing gloom, which showed that the day was nearly at a close.

Jack expected that as the night advanced the men would come below and turn in till morning.

But they did not appear, and, after considerable time, the silence above showed that their work was done.

The faint smell of tobacco stealing into the cabin indicated further that they were indulging in their pipes.

Long before this, Jack Winch had agreed with himself upon the course he meant to pursue.

He had slept so much through the day that he was confident he could keep awake the entire night through, besides which he was so filled with his scheme that there was nothing like drowsiness to warn him that he was in danger of failing from that cause.

His strategy was to pretend he was asleep, and after

throwing the outlaws off their guard, he hoped they would sink into slumber themselves and give him a chance to steal away from the boat.

It seemed to him that the fellows were a long while going to sleep, as the hours wore away, and still the smell of the tobacco reached him, and there was no stir on deck.

To one who was waiting like Jack, the time could not but seem very wearisome, and much longer than it really was.

At last the sounds reached him, however, which indicated that the outlaws were about to turn in for the night.

The expectation of course was that they would enter the cabin and take possession of the hammocks, but such was not their purpose.

The night was so mild and pleasant, that the deck was preferred to any other place, and Jack found out that they meant to sleep there.

Before doing so, one of them came to the cabin-door and called to him.

He did not answer, and the call was repeated several times in a louder key, with the same result, or rather with no result at all.

Then the Mexican came into the place, and feeling round the couch until his hand rested upon the shoulder of the boy, he shook him roughly, but still failed to wake him.

With a muttered exclamation, he went back to join his companion, and doubtless to report that their prisoner was as unconscious as a log.

"I guess I fooled them *that* far," concluded the boy, with some natural exultation, "for they think I am so sound asleep that I won't open my eyes again until morning.

When they would sink into the same condition was an all-important matter to him, for a mistake on that point would be one which he could not correct.

Young as was Jack Winch, he realized very well that he could make but one attempt to escape.

If he should fail now he would fail for all time.

The darkness in the cabin was as profound as that of Egypt.

After awhile he stirred about to see whether that would attract notice from above.

He made considerable noise, but could not see that it was heard by either of his captors.

Then he reached out his hand to learn whether his gun was in place, and was gratified to find that it was.

"If I go," he thought, "that little thing goes with me, dead sure."

It was a strange thing for the Mexicans to do in thus leaving a loaded gun within reach of the boy.

But they must have concluded from his size and age that he could not screw his courage up to the point of using it.

The next resort of Jack was to roll out of his hammock and strike with a heavy bump on the floor.

This was also accompanied by quite a racket, but, so far as he could ascertain, it occasioned not the slightest notice from above.

It appeared that the way was already open, but he dared not undertake to get out as yet.

"I think I'll wait another hour," he said to himself, "and then they will be sure to be asleep."

He actually waited full two hours, during which there was not the slightest tendency to drowsiness on his part, though for most of the time he was stretched out upon the hammock in the most favorable posture to lose his consciousness.

He needed no sleep, and he was not in the condition to secure it if he really required it.

When the period mentioned had expired, Jack Winch made up his mind that the attempt should be made.

For the twentieth time he asked Heaven to guide him in the venture he was to undertake, and then reaching out for his gun, he made his way to the bottom of the few steps leading to the deck.

This he did without the least noise, and had he been also able to move the rest of the distance in the same manner, his safety would have been assured from the beginning.

At every movement of the foot he paused to listen, but there was nothing to cause any misgiving.

This was repeated until he had gone up the steps one by one, and at last stood on the highest, ready to place his foot on the deck.

Here began the real danger, and the lad waited a long time before making the venture.

CHAPTER XI

A DARING EFFORT

THE night, like the previous one, was without any moon, and so dark that Jack Winch could not see the length of the deck.

There were enough stars shining overhead to show that the sky was clear, and there was nothing to be dreaded in the shape of a tropical storm.

Though the boy could see naught of the outlaws, he was gratified to receive other evidence of their being in the somnolent condition he so ardently desired.

Both were breathing heavily on the deck, somewhere close at hand.

The fear caused him to hesitate for a time.

Suppose they were also feigning sleep, as he had done, for the purpose of luring him on to the attempt which would give them the pretext to kill him!

It did not occur to Jack that if they wished to put him out of the way they would not wait for a pretext for so doing.

He was very desirous of learning precisely where the two were stretched, for it would be very awkward if he should happen to set his foot down on the stomach of one of the villains.

He thought he could tell this by the sense of hearing, as the overshadowing trees made it impossible to take the slightest advantage of the faint starlight which penetrated to some other places on that night.

One thing, however, was certain—the deck was so small that he must pass close to where both the men were lying.

A few minutes' halt for reconnoissance and prayer, and Jack Winch resumed his flight.

The only plan that he could form while waiting in the cabin was merely that of leaving the boat.

As to what he should do upon reaching the wood was a question which he must settle afterward.

Step by step he advanced, moving along the small deck with the silence of a shadow, until he had gone two-thirds of the distance between the bow and stern.

At this juncture he lifted his foot and placed it down on the arm of one of the Mexicans.

He discovered the misstep before he bore his entire weight upon the limb, but he was sure that all was lost.

The fellow stirred and muttered, but he did not wake, and the hot shivers that had been chasing each other up and down the back of the boy ceased, and he immediately gained a greater degree of confidence than before.

If such a disturbance as that failed to arouse his ene-

mies, he might well feel secure against their awaking when he made no noise greater than that of a cautious stepping over the deck.

This assurance enabled Jack to stand still some two or three minutes while he peered around in the gloom, and tried to decide what was the best thing for him to do next.

How to leave the craft was the question he considered.

The difficulty was, he could not use his eyes to any advantage.

The vessel was lying so close to land that, if he could only be sure of where he ought to place his feet, he could make the jump in an instant and have it over.

The temptation to leap out in the darkness in the direction of land was strong, and had either of the Mexicans awaked he would have done so.

He had already advanced so far that there was to be no such thing as retreat.

A new danger suddenly appeared, of which Jack had never dreamed.

While he was looking about in the gloom, he discerned a small but bright light but a short distance away.

As nearly as he could judge, it was on the other side the bay in which the craft was resting.

His first thought was that it was a large star, but

its motion showed that it could not be that, and immediately after, the noise made by dipping oars showed that it was some sort of light carried in a boat.

While still looking in that direction, he suddenly awoke to the alarming fact that the boat containing it was being rowed toward the craft on whose deck he was standing!

That was an alarming discovery indeed, and suggested to Jack in the most emphatic manner that it would not do to hesitate any longer.

The smaller boat would be at the side of the larger one in a few minutes, and the men of both would be in communication with each other.

Almost at the same second in which he awoke to this, there came a call from the little boat, which was no more than a hundred yards off.

It was so loud that the boy wondered why it didn't bring both of his foes to their feet.

But Jack did not stand idle during this exciting moment.

As rapidly as he dared, he moved along the deck, feeling with his hands for the rope of the boat which he believed was tied fast to the larger one.

Thus he traversed the whole length of the deck, but his hand touched nothing which felt like a rope.

The situation was desperate, and the terror of the little fellow was increased when the signal or call was

repeated from the men approaching, and was actually answered by one of the Mexicans within ten feet of where the lad stood!

There was danger for a minute that the boy would become paralyzed with fear, and remain where he was until detected or would lose his presence of mind altogether.

Fortunately he escaped both fatal mishaps.

Realizing the desperate character of the situation, he placed his hand on the gunwale as a guide, and then passed both feet over and sat down so as to put him in a position ready to make the leap when ready.

In doing this, however, he forgot his caution in his haste, and made a noise which attracted the suspicion of the outlaw standing so near him, that the fellow gave utterance to some wondering expression as to what the cause could be, and then stepped forward and reached out his hand toward the boy.

The latter heard him come, and gathering his strength as best he could, made a bound from the sitting position, and succeeded in going quite a respectable distance for one placed at such a disadvantage.

He was relieved beyond measure to land upon the hard ground instead of in the water, as he dreaded.

Had he dropped in the current, the Mexican would have learned the precise spot where he fell, and most probably would have clutched him before he could have recovered *terra firma*.

As it was, the dull thump caused by his feet striking the earth was heard by the outlaw, who was sharp-witted enough to understand what it meant.

With a horrible imprecation he called to his comrade to awaken, and then, with only a few seconds' delay, bounded over the gunwale, striking almost on the very spot where the lad had landed.

This was the most critical time of all, for the least failure of resource or loss of presence of mind would be fatal.

It was a great trial of the nerves of the boy, but he proved equal to the test.

Just so soon as he felt his feet upon the hard ground, he moved as stealthily and rapidly away from the spot as he could.

Instead of going straight into the wood he turned to the right, and sneaked up the stream.

Thus it was that he came to be a dozen feet from where he struck, and where the Mexican came down on the earth in his search after him.

Here again, the least inadvertence would have ended the hunt in the most disastrous manner for him.

The outlaw being on shore stopped and stood still, during which he listened for the slightest sound that could tell him where the fugitive was.

But, unfortunately for the ruffian, the boy was as motionless and still as he, and he failed to get the clue for which he was looking.

But the situation of Jack was critical, for the boat which had attracted his notice and alarm was now within a few rods of where he was standing, with the occupants in a very wide awake condition.

A few more strokes and they would be where he was, and the game would be up and all lost.

To make matters worse, the second outlaw was up and on the alert.

To remain where he was any longer was to insure discovery, and to move did not promise much greater success.

As fate would have it, the small boat with the light in it was heading directly toward the spot where the boy was standing.

As the darkness of the wood promised the best security, Jack turned about and began stealing as quietly as he could into that.

Despite the care which he used, the keen ear of the listening Mexican heard him, and he made a rush toward the spot.

The boy dived deeper into the wood and suddenly found himself in the water.

The depth, however, was only a few inches, and the bottom was so hard that it caused him no inconvenience; but the unavoidable splashing served to tell his pursuer more certainly where he was.

Jack did not dare to turn back, for his enemy was too close.

So he dashed ahead with all the desperate speed he could command.

The water continued of the same shallow depth, its width being a couple of rods or so.

Before the young fugitive could reach the wooded shore for which he was striving, the Mexican was close behind him.

"*Carah—h—h!*" he muttered, with his knife in his hand, holding it with a tight grasp, ready to plunge it into the body of the lad the instant he should come within striking distance.

Before he could do that, Jack wheeled about, with his rifle aimed straight at the outlaw's breast.

"Stop, or I'll shoot!" he called out.

This defiance was so unexpected that the fellow almost ran upon the muzzle of his rifle before he could check himself.

But he was terrified most thoroughly, and ducked his head as if he saw the bullet coming.

"Go, quick! or I'll fire, any way!"

The outlaw was so taken all aback that he wheeled about and darted for the shore again.

Had he suspected any such move on the part of the boy, he would have checkmated it in advance by shooting him.

He carried a pistol, but he needed a minute or so to draw and prepare it for use.

Had Jack remained any longer where he was, it might have gone ill with him, but, without comprehending the imperative necessity of such a step, he no sooner saw his enemy fleeing from him than he also turned and fled.

He would have fired the gun at the fellow, could he have felt sure of hitting him, but in the gloom and excitement he was afraid to run the risk.

Jack was too sensible to attempt any more hiding, now that the Mexicans were fully aroused and on the hunt for him.

Not only the two who had charge of the larger craft, but those who came up in the small-boat, had caught the "idea" and joined in the search.

The young fugitive heard them signaling on all sides, like so many Indians trying to drive some game from cover.

He endeavored to get along without any noise, but at such a time, when haste was more important than anything else, it was out of the question, and the danger was that he would draw his pursuers directly to him.

Better fortune attended his daring effort to get away.

When he had run a considerable distance, he ventured to stop for a second or two to get breath.

To his delight, he heard nothing of his enemies.

They seemed to have given up the pursuit altogether.

Young as Jack was, he was too wise to be entirely satisfied with this silence.

To him it had the appearance of a part of a trick to deceive and lead him into some trap.

At any rate, he did not accept it as proof that he was beyond all present danger, but he began to steal along so deliberately that he was able to do it without any noise at all.

It was the wisest thing he could have done, and, indeed, the only course that saved him.

He had been gone from the place but a moment, when the Mexican who had run such a risk of being shot stole as silently forward as a shadow, grasping his knife, and looking eagerly for his victim.

CHAPTER XII

TREED

But the victim wasn't there.

The Mexican groped around and listened and peered everywhere for the boy, but he failed to gain the least clue of him.

It looked very much as if the outlaw had been outwitted by one whose years numbered one-fourth of his.

Still he waited and listened for something that might serve to tell him where the daring little fellow was, but it was all in vain.

In a short time he was joined by two others, who did all they could to help him, but their assistance amounted to nothing, and finally they were all compelled to go back to the bay without any knowledge as to where the lad was.

But they did not give up the hope of retaking him by any means.

With the coming of the morrow they could track him through the woods, and as he would not be able to tell where he was or how he was to get out of the forest, it looked as if they had a good chance of getting him, after all.

Jack made the most of his chance of escape, now that he had succeeded in getting away thus far.

He kept up his stealthy flight until he was more than a hundred yards from where he started, when he began to breathe more freely and to consider himself safe.

Nothing was to be discovered of his pursuers, and after walking some distance further in a more careless and natural manner, he slowed up, and for the first time since his capture endeavored to think calmly upon what was before him.

Now that he was free of his enemies, what was he to do?

The one great object of his heart just then was to find the means of effecting a junction with his Uncle Frede, whom he supposed was making a hunt for him.

The only way in which he could gain any idea of the points of the compass was by the sound of the ocean.

Listening carefully, he was able to detect the roar of the deep, and he turned his steps toward it.

"When I get there," he said to himself, "all that I have to do is to keep along the coast till I reach the spot where we had our camp last night, and then I will find him, *if he is there.*"

The latter clause he added in response to the thought that the hunt of the uncle might have led him away from the spot he had in view.

However, the wisest course the boy could take, no doubt, was that which he adopted.

One great advantage, it prevented that inevitable and tantalizing blunder which follows a man when he is lost and is without any landmarks to consult.

Instead of wandering aimlessly around in an irregular circle, Jack Winch was enabled to follow something like a straight line.

How far he had to travel to reach the sea he could not conjecture, as the roar of the deep on a still night is of that nature that a mile's distance makes scarcely any perceptible difference.

It was not likely that the route was such that he would not have reached it before morning had he been permitted to continue on his way, but he had not gone far when a startling interruption occurred.

This came in the discovery that some person or animal was following him.

This is not the most pleasant discovery that one can make on a dark night, when he is away from home, and when Jack heard the stealthy footsteps close behind him, he gave a howl of terror and sprang from the ground.

Then he recollected that his loaded gun was in his hand, and his consternation decreased very much.

His first supposition was that his old enemy, the Mexican, was close on his track, and about to seize him.

"Keep off!" he called out in a suppressed voice. "If you touch me you'll get a bullet, dead sure."

There was no response to this, and the peculiar noise on the leaves, at that instant, caused Jack to know that it was a quadruped instead of a biped that was paying him such unpleasant attentions.

This was much better than he had at first supposed, but he knew, for all that, he was in great peril.

There could be no doubt that the animal—whatever it was—had hostile intentions toward the lad, and was only waiting to make up his mind as to the most advisable method of making a late supper of him.

The darkness in the wood remained so profound, that Jack could see nothing at all of the creature.

But he was sure he was of immense size, and meant to chew him up in a dozen mouthfuls.

How fortunate that he had his loaded gun with him!

How unfortunate that he couldn't gain the chance to draw a bead on the fierce quadruped!

When the lad halted, the beast did the same, and thus the two stood confronting each other in the darkness.

He supposed that the creature was able to detect him, but the boy could not gain the first glimpse of him.

The low muttering growl that reached his ears caused the beast at once to grow to double the size of what Jack imagined him to be in the first place.

That growl convinced the boy that the most terrible animal of the Mexican forests—whatever that might be—was at his heels.

The fugitive was afraid to start forward again, lest it might make a leap and drop upon his head.

So long as he maintained his present position the danger was of that nature.

It would not do to risk a shot.

Now, above all other occasions, it must be sure.

If he should miss the beast, or only wound him, the boy would be at his mercy.

In other words, the shot would necessarily kill the lad or the animal.

Jack preferred that the animal should be the victim.

While he was standing thus on the guard, holding the rifle grasped and partly pointed, he suddenly caught sight of the eyes.

Like such creatures, there was a phosphorescent, greenish glow to the orbs, which caused them, when seen at a certain angle, to glisten like fire.

No better shot than this afforded could be asked, and Jack pointed his weapon straight between the eyes and pulled the trigger.

The instant the gun was fired he sprang back and interposed the trunk of the tree between him and his foe.

The latter was wounded to the death, and with a

howl of agony sprang into the air and rolled over on the ground in his dying struggles.

The bullet having imbedded itself in the brain, the brute did not take much time to die, but in a few minutes he was stretched out stiff, with his life-work done.

Gratified at the manner in which he had escaped his new danger, Jack threw his gun over his shoulder and resumed his march toward the Pacific.

"It's lucky that I didn't shoot that Mexican," said he, recalling the incidents of the last half-hour, "for if I had done so, I wouldn't have had any charge left for that tiger, as I guess he must be; and that makes it seem as lucky for the Mexican as it was for me. But I hain't got ammunition to use now, and I hope there won't be anything coming along that will make me——"

The wish was in his mouth, when his blood was chilled again by hearing precisely the same sort of a growl that he had just ended by a shot from his rifle.

It came from a point so near, too, that Jack started and looked around, expecting to catch the greenish glow again, but he did not.

There was a mighty big difference in the situation, now that the lad was unarmed.

More by instinct than by any process of reasoning, Jack threw his now useless gun to the ground and be-

gan a furious climbing of the tree, whose branches brushed his face at the moment of starting.

He never climbed a tree so quickly in all his life.

The expectation that some dreadful creature was in the act of leaping upward to catch his legs in his claws tended to act as a tonic to the young fugitive, who never ceased climbing until he had reached the very top, and failed to find any more tree within his reach to climb.

At such an elevation it would be supposed that the fugitive was safe from further disturbance, but such proved not to be the case.

Jack had left his gun on the ground, because he was in such a hurry to get up the tree, and it was of no account to him, now that the barrel was empty.

But he was just beginning to breathe freely, when an agitation of the whole body of the branches filled him with consternation again.

Whatever the nature of the animal, it was certain he was a climber, for he was in among the limbs at that very moment!

Jack believed he was cornered at last, but he did not despair.

He descended a few feet, as if he meant to meet the animal, but, instead of doing so, he worked his way out toward the end of a thick, strong branch, where he paused and tremblingly waited to see what the wild creature was going to do about it.

In this instance the action of the boy accomplished more than he intended or expected.

The wild beast, seeing him coming, must have believed he was after him—a supposition which generally acts as a check for a time on the dumb animals.

However, the partial fright did not extend to scaring the creature from his perch.

There he stuck, not more than a couple of yards away from the perch of the boy, who did nothing but look down and stare at the two greenish eyes that were staring so fiercely at him.

The very terror of the situation gave Jack a courage which he could not have commanded under other circumstances.

Holding by the hands, he let himself down till his feet touched the limb which supported his frightful foe.

All the time the brute was growling and snarling in a threatening way, but for some cause or other, he held back.

Resting both feet upon this branch, Jack Winch merely poised and balanced his body by means of the limb to which he was clinging.

His position was a fearful one at this time.

If the animal chose to make the exertion, he could rend him to pieces in a twinkling.

Why he did not do so is a mystery which can only be guessed at.

As soon as Jack was confident that he had his feet just as they ought to be, he raised up and then jumped down with all his might upon the trunk of the branch supporting his enemy.

The shock was so violent that the beast was displaced and fell tumbling to the ground.

As he went, he clutched and scratched at the leaves and twigs, in a furious, savage way, which would have arrested his descent had he been given a moment in which to prepare himself.

As it was, he never stopped till he landed on hard ground below.

The whole thing was cleverly done; but if the animal should take it into his head to leap up again, it was not at all likely the boy would find it such an easy matter to displace him.

It was a curious fact that the wild beast did not repeat his attempt upon the life of the lad.

His reception by the little fellow must have given him an idea that he was a very peculiar chap, who might be hatching some trick more disagreeable than was the last.

He probably felt like the barbarians when Archimedes began to get his work in on them.

He didn't know what was coming next.

But if the brute chose to remain on the ground, he did not leave the vicinity.

It may be that he was waiting till daylight to gain a view of the boy that had displaced him from his perch.

At any rate, Jack heard him walking around beneath the tree, growling and snarling, and occasionally pausing as if he had made up his mind to try it again among the branches.

Several times the boy caught sight of the gleaming orbs, and he could not but wonder why it was the creature left him alone.

There was no danger of Jack going to sleep in such a situation, and he maintained his perch, looking down and listening for the dreaded leap until the growing light in the east showed that the night was ended and blessed day had come again.

CHAPTER XIII

WANDERINGS IN THE WOOD

At the earliest streakings of light in the East, the wild animal that had held Jack Winch in such terror through most of the night took his departure.

He whisked away and out of sight before the boy could gain a glimpse of him, so that he was never able to learn the species to which he belonged.

Very naturally, the lad was wearied with his cramped and long-continued position in the tree, and as soon as he found the animal had gone he came down and stretched his limbs.

The rifle remained just as he had left it, when he made his hurried ascent of the tree, and he picked it up, and started in the direction of the dull roar which came from the ocean.

"I have heard Uncle Frede tell how some of the Indians in Mexico and the United States can track anybody through the woods and over rocks and among bushes and everywhere but in the water, and I wonder now whether those Mexicans wont be after me."

It seemed so probable to the boy that he was rendered quite uneasy.

He examined his own trail for a short ways back and found that it was so distinctly marked that he could trace it with little difficulty.

"Well, well," he muttered in alarm, "that won't do; they'll be along here inside of half an hour."

As a means of throwing his enemies off the track, he turned from the direct course to the sea, and made a little hunt for the water, in which he hoped to hide his trail.

He was more fortunate than he had a right to expect.

Only a little ways from where he had spent the greater part of the night, he found a small narrow bay which put in from the ocean for quite a distance up into the interior.

The water of this was quite muddy, so that he was in doubt whether it was over his head or not.

However, he was able to swim, though he did not relish the prospect of a ducking, now that his clothes were dry and comfortable upon him.

So he removed his shoes and stockings, rolled up his trowsers and waded carefully out from shore.

He went far enough to be sure his trail could not be seen through the water, when he commenced to make his way down stream toward the ocean.

His whole object in doing this, as we have explained, was to prevent the Mexicans trailing him, as he believed they would attempt to do.

He was fearful of dropping in some hole over his head, and moved with such extreme care that it required a full hour for him to pass a couple of hundred yards.

Even then he would not have come out the inlet, as it appeared to be, had not some sort of denizen of the sea whisked by him so closely that he felt the cold touch against his leg.

"A shark! a shark!" he yelled, as he floundered out and danced about and looked down several times at his legs, to satisfy himself that they had not been bitten off.

This ended his traveling through the water for the present.

Replacing his shoes and stockings, he resumed his flight along the bank of the bay, which curved so sweepingly to the left that he could look almost across it, as it were, and see the spot where he had entered in the first place. Could he believe his eyes?

There, sure enough, he saw the very Mexicans from whom he was fleeing, approach the bank of the inlet and stare at something in the water.

Providentially, Jack happened to look that way the very moment that they appeared, and he darted back out of sight before they raised their eyes.

Crouching behind a tree, he peered out and watched them.

There could be no doubt, from their actions, that

they had been following his trail just as he expected them to do.

They walked to the margin of the water, where they paused, and he could see from their gestures that they were discussing some matter in a very excited manner.

Seeing nothing on the surface of the inlet which could explain where the young fugitive had gone, the eyes of the outlaws roamed up and down the shore, in quest of some clue.

Jack was in such trepidation lest they should see him that he shrank into as small a space as possible, and only dared to peep out just as he used to do at home when playing the game of hide-and-seek.

But the distance was too great for the outlaws to discover him, and, after standing where they were a few minutes longer, the two turned about and disappeared from sight.

"I guess they've got enough of hunting for me," concluded the boy, venturing to resume his journey down the stream.

With the inlet to guide them, Jack had no fear of going wrong, and he picked his way along as carefully as he could, clinging to the shelter of the wood, and on the constant watch for either friend or foe.

Jack, we say, had no apprehension of getting astray, but he was yet to learn how easily one may go wrong, when he is confident he is on the right path.

The course of the inlet was so winding that the roar of the ocean was sometimes at his back and again in his front or on his side.

He had passed over perhaps a mile, and was going along with a more than usual careless gait, when he came around another turn of the bay, and stopped with an exclamation of amazement.

"I should like to know what that means," he said to himself, staring and wondering.

That which caused his wonderment was a vessel lying close to land, and on the same side of the inlet that he was.

So far as he could judge, it looked very much like the one from which he had managed to make his escape.

"Queer what business that has there," he added, surveying it with great interest. "Hello! there are some of the crew."

Two men at that moment appeared on deck and walked, one after the other, toward the cabin near the stern.

The consternation of the boy may be guessed when he recognized them as the Mexicans that had followed him to the edge of the water.

Having once seen them, he could make no mistake about their identity.

The inevitable conclusion was, that this was also the craft from which he had fled during the night.

Consequently, instead of going down stream toward the ocean, as he had believed he was doing, he had been ascending the inlet, and was not only that much further from the Pacific, but so close to his enemies that he could have thrown a stone to them.

But, as Jack had kept along with the current, he was puzzled for a time to understand how this could be, until he reflected that he was deceived by the tide setting up the inlet.

He had mistaken that for the natural flow of the water into the ocean.

The discovery disheartened him for a while, but he soon rallied, when he came to understand how it was, and he turned about and started with renewed energy to recover the lost ground.

He had a long ways to travel to reach the ocean, along whose beach he expected to find something which would lead to where his uncle was awaiting him; but he had only to persevere to reach it in time.

Although Jack had put in a good supply of sleep on the previous day, yet a night had since passed without his gaining a minute of slumber, and he now became sensible of the need of it.

His system had been subjected to such a strain, and he had already walked so far, that he could not escape a feeling of weariness and drowsiness, which caused him to long for a few more hours of rest before finishing his search.

Beside this, he was in need of food, and this, united with his anxiety to find his relative, caused him to feel anything but comfortable.

He was too close to the vessel containing his enemies to venture to rest where he was, and he kept his weary footsteps dragging along until he had accomplished a half mile or so, when, an inviting place presenting itself, he threw himself on the ground and almost immediately fell asleep.

Providence watched over him, and during the hours that he slumbered no danger came nigh him.

When he opened his eyes, the sun was in the meridian, and the day was oppressively warm.

But he was greatly refreshed by his rest, and sprang up ready and eager to continue his journey.

It still seemed to Jack that the only means by which he could expect to find his relative was by making his way to the place of their encampment on the beach.

But while moving along the inlet, he was struck with the absurdity of supposing that during the several days that had passed since their separation Alfredo had staid in the same spot.

"I s'pose while I've been looking for him, he's been looking for me, and when I get out on the shore he may be miles away in the woods, and both of us getting further apart all the time."

This reflection tended to slacken his steps somewhat,

but he persevered, and in a short time thereafter passed the very place where he had entered the water on the preceding afternoon, when seeking to hide his trail from the Mexicans.

"It seems to me that I haven't had anything to eat since we left home a fortnight ago," he muttered, as he reflected on his hunger.

There were evidences of the wonderful growth of the tropics in the woods around him, though nothing like what he expected to find further in the interior.

There were plenty of berries, which looked inviting to the taste, but heretofore he had left them alone, through fear of being poisoned.

Now, however, he was so hungered that he was willing to risk it.

"I might as well be poisoned to death as to starve," was his theory, as he began plucking some yellow and scarlet berries growing upon bushes about the height of his head.

He found them pleasant to the taste, though rather sticky, and inclined to hold on to the hands.

But he was thus enabled to do a great deal toward satisfying that craving which demanded food of some kind in such language that he was in misery until it could be procured.

In the course of an hour he had reached a point on the inlet lower than had been touched before, and the

deepening of the roar of the ocean showed that it was not far off.

"I wonder if there is any danger from those Mexicans?" he asked himself, when he found he was so near the beach. "They may think that that is where I'm going, and go down there themselves and head me off."

There was nothing very improbable in this, but it did not cause Jack to alter his course, for in case it was changed he had nowhere else to turn.

At last, as he began one of those sweeping curves for which this inlet was marked, he caught sight of the ocean ahead.

It was yet some distance off, but there it was, as grand and impressive and beautiful as it must be to the end of time.

Looking far out to sea, he could catch a sight of a white line of foam on the blue expanse, showing where the breakers were coming in toward land.

And in the very horizon was a sail creeping along like some great bird resting on the water.

Between that and the shore was a steamer, most probably on its way to California.

The distance was such that that, too, to the casual glance, seemed to be stationary, while the dark line of vapor from its smoke-stack appeared like a line of clouds resting against the sky.

But both, of course, were moving, as they were soon seen to be crossing the patch of sea exposed to view.

While Jack was gazing at them they went out of sight.

Almost immediately another sail appeared, much closer in, and as it was headed in, he believed that it was going to come ashore.

"I'll bet that father has sent that after me," was his first thought. "And if Uncle Frede and me don't get away from this spot pretty soon, he'll take us, sure."

Further reflection convinced him that his first supposition was without foundation, and indeed impossible, under the circumstances.

"I'll go on and hunt up Uncle Frede," he added, starting forward, "and then we'll see whether——"

"I guess I wouldn't hurry, young man!"

The startling words were uttered in the very ear of Jack Winch, and at the same moment his arm was grasped by some one with a grip like that of iron.

CHAPTER XIV.

TRAVELING INLAND

For one moment Jack Winch was paralyzed with terror, when, as he stood looking at the sea and communing with himself, he felt his arm seized and himself addressed by some one behind him.

He had been thinking of the Mexicans but an instant before, and he was sure it was one of them who had caaptured him again.

But the happiest kind of a surprise greeted him.

It was Uncle Frede, and nobody else!

There he was, with the same handsome face lit up by smiles, and as delighted to meet the boy as the latter was to meet him.

"I think it's about time you showed yourself," said he, "for I've been hunting for you most of two days past. Where have you been? Come, give an account of yourself."

Jack had to laugh and shake the hand of his uncle over and over several times, before he could bring himself down to anything like sober talk.

Finally, when they had moved along a short distance further, until they reached a point close to the mouth

of the inlet, they sat down on the sand and talked it all over with each other.

The boy told his uncle all that has been made known to the reader, and then Alfredo took up the story and gave a little more than we have related.

He said that he had kept up the search ever since, but was almost in despair when he learned that he had been carried off to sea.

Beyond the tracking of him to the water's edge, he had no means of going, and he was debating the point of proceeding to Panama, and engaging the captain in the search, when his course led him up the inlet along whose bank he found his young friend.

While pursuing his way with no certainty as to what he would do, he espied the craft in which the boy had actually been taken away.

Of course he had no means of knowing this, but he suspected it, and he determined to find out before proceeding further.

He was provided with gun and pistol, and in case of a fight, was confident he could take care of himself.

He hailed the boat several times, but receiving no answer, he boarded it with the purpose of compelling attention.

A short search showed him that no one was on it.

This was on the morning succeeding the escape of Jack from the vessel, and as the reader will remember,

the two men who composed the crew were away at that time searching for him.

No clue being obtainable, Frede left the boat to continue his search in his aimless way, trusting very much to Providence and very little to his own energies and skill.

The second day passed without learning anything additional, and his solicitude was of the most painful nature.

His belief was that the men who had robbed him had carried off the boy with the intention of holding him for ransom.

Taking him to some safe position in the mountains, they could notify his friends that he would be returned on the payment of a large sum of money.

The funds, of course, would be procured, but that was not the kind of business in which Alfredo desired to engage.

And so the second day dawned, and the man was in a disconsolate mood, when to his unbounded amazement he caught sight of Jack but a short ways ahead of him, as he stood and looked out upon the sea.

In a few minutes he slipped up behind him, and here they were.

"And have you anything to eat?" asked the boy, the instant the naration was finished.

"Are you hungry?"

"I never was so nigh starving in all my life."

"The place where I spent last night is only a short distance from here, and there is abundance of the best kind of food."

"Let's go to it, then, as quick as lightning," said Jack, springing to his feet and waiting impatiently for his relative to show him the road leading thereto.

Alfredo kept his word.

A comparatively short distance away was found the spot where the night had been spent, and where he had cooked enough food for several men.

Jack ate all he could possibly hold, and then asked his uncle about the berries he had swallowed.

He was greatly relieved to find that they were harmless, and no ill effects need be apprehended.

As both had secured a good night's rest and were now provided with a substantial breakfast, it was agreed that they should strike at once for the interior without any more delay.

Alfredo had lost his watch—and so had Jack—and he had been robbed of a large sum of money.

But he had made known to his companion that he was not penniless by any means.

"I carry a belt around my body," he laughed, "and I guess there is enough there to pay for a guide when we find him."

"Where are we going to find him?" was the natural question.

"Oh, there is no need of being alarmed; there are plenty of people in this part of the world, and any one of them will do, if only he is paid enough for his services."

"I hope we will soon find him, for if we hang around here much longer, the Mexicans may come back."

"I rather wish they would," replied Alfredo, "for I would like to pay a part of that debt I owe them."

"How far can we go without a guide, uncle?"

"We might succeed in reaching Vera Cruz, but I wouldn't want to try it, for there are some ugly places among those mountains that you can see yonder."

"Then there must be people living between here and there, or you wouldn't be so sure of finding a guide."

"Of course; there are lots of them, and we won't get very far into the country before some of them will find us out and will be down to learn what we want. In that way, you see, we will be able to pick our man."

"Suppose the man is a robber like those who ran away with me?"

"We cannot escape that risk; but I have seen so many of those characters that I can tell very well what he is before I engage him."

"How long do you think we shall be in reaching Vera Cruz.

"That is a hard question to answer. It might be done in the course of three or four weeks, and it may

take us much longer. A great deal will depend on the sort of guide we secure."

"And then, if we ain't in a hurry, we can potter along as long as we want to."

"That is logical; we shall meet and see enough there to engage our interest, I can assure you."

"Any bears and tigers?"

"I rather think not, but there are so many disagreeable inhabitants that you will wish there were less."

"Any snakes?"

"Millions of them. You ought to remember that all tropical countries abound with poisonous reptiles, and I consider that the great danger in traveling through a section like this is with the reptiles more than anything else."

"How is it that I haven't been bothered with any while I was poking round in the woods?"

"You're a little too near the sea; if you want to find them in abundance, you must go into the interior, and it is not necessary to go very far, either. We shall meet them very soon."

"What kind are they?"

"Don't ask me such questions," replied the uncle, "for it would be out of my power to answer. Have a little patience, and you will learn before you are many days older."

"I ain't afraid of being hurt by any of them, but

I'd like to see some bigger animals than what you've been talking about."

"It is not given to you to choose what you shall meet. You know that there is scarcely any part of the world which does not contain wonders that could keep your attention and interest for weeks, and months and years."

Now that they had turned their backs upon their friends and home for a time, the two explorers addressed themselves to the task which they had undertaken, and which was sure to be attended with plenty of adventure, and mayhap with considerable danger.

The couple had been on similar excursions before, though never upon anything so extensive; but they had, or rather the boy, who was quick-witted, had picked up a great deal of the ways of the wood, and was far more capable of assisting in a work of this kind than would be expected from one of his tender years.

He was the owner of the small light rifle, purchased expressly for him over a year before, and he was quite expert in its use.

Unlike too many lads of his age, he was sensible that most people, and especially the gentleman who had him in charge, knew a great deal more of the world than he did, and he was attentive and ready to obey at all times.

Add to this, that both were the happy possessors of robust health, and it will be admitted that the conditions were favorable for an excursion that was likely to prove one that would remain a pleasant memory to them all their lives.

Looking in land from the coast, a variegated country was seen composed of woodland and hill, while a little to the left, and a long distance away, the outline of a chain of mountains, among which were several peaks of great elevation, were observed against the clear sky.

The little field-glass which Alfredo always carried with him showed the misty contour of another range directly ahead, toward which they intended to press their way.

"And through which we must go," added the gentleman.

"It will be hard work to climb over them," said Jack, after he had taken a look through the telescope.

"So hard that we will not attempt it," said his friend.

"How then? Shall we go round?"

"No, but through them; we shall find passes and footpaths which will save us such great labor; all I want now is to come across some fellow who lives in this neighborhood, and whom we can hire to accompany us the rest of the way."

"Suppose we don't find him?"

"Then we shall go alone."

While these words were passing between the two, they were pressing forward, hopeful and in high spirits over the prospects before them.

As yet they had seen nothing of man or animal, and had little expectation of meeting with any adventure for several days to come.

Alfredo took some provisions with them, for, although in this tropical country, and at this season of the year, he was quite confident of finding abundance of vegetation and fruit, he was desirous of being prepared for all emergencies.

At noon they halted under some luxuriant trees, which afforded such a grateful shade from the fervid rays of the sun that they concluded to remain where they were until the orb was lower in the sky, and the task of traveling should become less laborious.

Several hours later they rose to their feet and moved forward, the ground becoming more undulating and with a deeper growth of forest as their distance from the coast increased.

They suffered considerably from thirst, as they were unable to find a drop of water, in spite of the diligent search made by Alfredo until toward night, when to their delight they came upon a small stream which tumbled and fell foaming from among the rocks, with a current as clear and cool as if it issued from the mountains above and beyond them.

"Here we will make our first camp," said the gentleman, as he threw down his little bundle and gun, and began gathering fuel with which to start a fire.

"We couldn't have a better place," said Jack, who was glad that the day's journey had come to an end. "It seems to me that I was never so tired in all my life."

"That's because you haven't become used to this sort of traveling; after a few days you won't mind it at all. Hello! we have a visitor."

The last remark was caused by the parting of the bushes near them, and the approach of a man, who was a stranger to both.

CHAPTER XV

VEGA, THE GUIDE

THE appearance of a stranger in this great solitude could not but cause Alfredo and little Jack to feel the greatest interest in his identity.

That he was a native of the neighborhood was perceived at a glance. He was tall, and of very powerful build, his naturally swarthy face made darker and more swarthy by years of exposure to the tropical sun and the fierce storms that sometimes sweep over those sections. His hair was as black as midnight, and hung over his shoulders in neglected masses, while a scanty beard of the same hue appeared in the shape of a scrawny mustache and straggling tuft upon his chin.

His eyes were large and of piercing blackness, and his costume was scanty, even for those warm regions. He was dressed very much like the Indians of the United States, wearing the breech cloth, and the heavy blanket sometimes upon the shoulders, sometimes upon the arm, as convenience demanded. In the girdle about his waist was thrust a formidable knife, and it is hardly necessary to say that he carried a large rifle, in the use of which it was too safe to suppose he was an expert.

The very moment that Alfredo saw this man, advancing from among the bushes with his slouched hat drawn close to his gleaming eyes, the thought occurred to him that he was the individual he wanted. The outer conditions impressed him favorably, and if he could be secured, was he the one with whom they could safely trust their lives was the queston which the future must settle.

The native did not seem to hold the invaders of his country in very great awe, for, with his penetrating eyes fixed upon them he moved unhesitatingly along in the direction of the fuel thrown together for their evening camp-fire.

Alfredo was as prompt to advance toward him, and to offer him his hand, saluting him at the same time in Spanish. The stranger replied in the same pleasant, flowing tongue, though there was a broken and imperfect accent, which proved that the language used here among the mountains was quite different from that which obtains among the cultivated classes in the settled portions of Mexico. The native was more intelligent than most of these half-civilized beings, else he would have experienced more difficulty in understanding the words addressed to him.

Following close upon the formal salutation, came the inquiry from the swarthy native as to what the business of the man and boy was in this section of the

world. Alfredo answered him truthfully, but the native appeared to be somewhat suspicious of the visitors, and he subjected the man to a cross examination which was enjoyed not a little by the victim. At last, however, the situation seemed to become satisfactory, and he signified as much.

It then became the turn of Alfredo to ask questions and he put them so searchingly and withal so delicately that he was not long in extracting all the information he desired.

The name of the native was Vega, and he resided in a small village some ten miles to the west, and altogether out of the path of the explorers on their way to Vera Cruz. When asked whether he was acquainted with the route to that city through the mountains, he smiled as if in pity of the ignorance of his questioners, and said that he had traveled and known it from his childhood.

Replying to the query that followed, as to his willingness to act as their guide and companion, he was not so certain. It would be necessary to visit his family and consult with them, and besides, he had a great deal of "business" on hand, and he did not think he could serve them; it would be well for them to hunt some one else.

Alfredo understood what all this meant, and he handled the subject like one who was accustomed to it.

The native was waiting to learn what terms the wealthy Mexican was ready to offer.

The terms, it is hardly worth our while to say, were such that the black eyes of Vega sparkled with delight, and he closed in with them at once, declaring that he would stand by them until they should enter Vera Cruz and leave the great forest behind them.

When Alfredo suggested that it was best that he should hurry off and acquaint his family with what he was about to do, he replied that that was unnecessary, as they would not be alarmed at his absence, and they were well able to take care of themselves if he should remain away an entire month. Alfredo was inclined to think it would have made very little difference if he had made his absence perpetual.

There remained but one drawback to perfect satisfaction on the part of Alfredo, and that was a lingering fear that Vega was not what he represented himself to be. Mexico is a land of revolutions, and this man might be one of a gang of desperadoes who had been driven to the mountains to save their necks, and were now roving through the country ready to commit any deed that promised to add anything to the money they so much needed.

The offer of Alfredo must have convinced Vega that it was *bona fide,* and that the one who made it was the possessor of wealth, which enabled him to take such

fanciful holidays as these. Such being the case, the chance of accompanying him into the mountains, where no human eye could witness the blow which he was certain to find opportunity to deal in the darkness of the night, was sure to be very tempting to one whose conscience had become seared by long years of danger and sin.

Such was the shadowy terror that rose before Alfredo as soon as he had made his agreement with the native; but the Mexican was a philosopher, who had acquired much worldly wisdom in his years of travel, and he reasoned that there was no bargain in this life in which there was not a certain mutual trust unavoidable. He considered himself quite a good judge of human nature, and he felt considerable confidence in Vega; at least he would accept him without any appearance of distrust, and he would manage during the next few days to keep such a close watch upon his actions, that, if there was any treachery, he would be sure to detect it.

By the time the talk was finished by the two men, the sun was well down toward the distant Pacific, which was visible from their elevated standpoint, and which, viewed in the last declining rays of day, looked like a sea of molten gold. Through the telescope they could catch sight of several sails in the distance looking like feathery clouds floating against the blue sky, while

others were but the faintest possible specks in the far away horizon.

The wood was kindled, though its warmth was not needed, but as the darkness closed around them, there was something in the presence of the cheerful light of a camp-fire that was like the society of a strong and cheerful man.

It was not yet fully dark when Vega, gun in hand, moved away as silently as a shadow in the depths of the wilderness.

"Where has he gone?" asked Jack, who was naturally interested in the man that was to be a member of their little company for weeks to come.

"I wonder whether he hasn't changed his mind and started for home?"

"No; he would hardly do that without telling us his intention. He knows how to use his tongue so well that he would not have kept silent at such a time. Jack, what do you think of him?"

"Well, I hardly know, 'cause I hain't had much chance to get acquainted yet."

"Of course not; but how do you feel toward him? Do you think he will be a pleasant companion?"

"Of course I do, 'cause he must know all about the country, and you see, Uncle Frede, that's a big part of the thing. I wonder if he hain't gone off so as to climb a tree and look down on us without our knowing it,

so as to get a good chance to study us without our being able to see him."

"He don't need to do that; he took our measure as he came out from the forest and before we had spoken a word to him; I am quite sure that he scrutinized us a good long while before he let us know he was anywhere about."

"What do you think is the matter with him, then?"

"I suspect he is after some kind of game to help us out with a rather scanty supper—there! that sounds like it."

This remark was caused by the sound of a gun, so near that there could be no doubt that it was fired by Vega, who had been gone but a few minutes.

The supposition of Alfredo proved the correct one, for the native reappeared, a few minutes later, bearing in his hand an animal which looked like a plump squirrel.

The guide dexterously removed the skin, and stretching it on a couple of sticks before the fire, it was not long before it was nicely browned, and formed a welcome addition to the dried maize cakes which Vega produced from a receptacle somewhere about his person, which are known in his country as *totopo,* and are peculiarly acceptable when eaten in the woods with the keen appetite awakened by a day of severe traveling.

When the supper was finished, the three assumed

comfortable positions before the camp-fire, and Vega lit a black pipe, from which he seemed to extract a great deal of enjoyment.

As he appeared to be in good spirits, Alfredo engaged him in conversation, and extracted much interesting information of his past life.

When Jack passed off into the land of dreams, the two were still talking, and when he awoke a moment from slumber they were still at it.

The boy gained a snuff of the strong tobacco which the native was smoking, and turned his nose away so as to escape it, and went off to sleep again with a sort of dim, misty wonder whether the two would keep up the conversation till there was nothing more left in the world for them to talk about.

The morning broke bright and beautiful, after a night unmarked by anything to disturb them, and Vega, after a few minutes' search, succeeded in shooting a couple more of the squirrels which were held in such high esteem by all as an article of diet.

Jack, however, was not so sure that he enjoyed them, when, after eating his fill, his uncle kindly told him that they were not squirrels, but rather rats, or at least they belonged to that family.

The animal is not classed by naturalists as yet, but there is little doubt that it is less of a squirrel than a rat.

Its coat is black on the back, gray on the flanks, and white under the belly, while the ears are bare.

The hunter is glad enough to secure him for a meal without stopping to consider how he should be classified by the men of science.

After a hearty draught from the cold, sparkling stream near the camp, the little party started again on their journey toward the northeast, Vega acting as their guide, and advancing with a confidence and certainty which showed that he was at home in these wilds.

There were many places where it seemed to the boy that it was impossible to advance any further, when the fellow, without the least hesitation, would turn aside into some unexpected and unseen path, made by himself or some wild animal, and the obstruction was circumvented in the easiest fashion imaginable.

The scenery grew more interesting as they progressed, and to the gratified surprise of Jack, the ground appeared to become more readily traveled, despite its undulating and frequently rocky nature.

Various kinds of birds of gorgeous plumage were encountered, among which was the *couroucou,* which gives forth a mournful cry that deepens one's sense of loneliness when heard in the depths of the great wilderness.

The bird itself is very attractive in appearance, the male being especially beautiful.

Their beaks are of a bright yellow, hooked like those of birds of prey.

The feathers on the head and back are sprinkled with a golden green, and the edges of the wings and belly are tinted with a fiery crimson, emerging into two black lines, which taper off toward the tail.

This interesting bird is known as the *trogon massena,* and they belong to the family of climbers, having two toes in front of their claws and two behind, similar to the parrot.

The explorers were now fairly in the great forest which stretches away for many miles in the land of the ancient Aztecs, and the wonders increased as they advanced, while, sooner than they expected, they found that the most serious kind of peril was ever lurking in the depths of this vast wilderness.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE SOLITUDES

THE little party of explorers found they were steadily ascending into the mountain region which is a part of the mighty system extending from Behring's Strait, on the north, to Terra del Fuego, at the extremity of South America.

There was a perceptible difference in the temperature, and glimpses were gained of the country such as constantly provoked expressions of delight from Jack Winch, who was becoming rapidly accustomed to this climbing business, and showed a nimbleness at times which Vega compared to that of the monkeys themselves.

"Uncle," said he, as they were making their way along in this manner, "you told me when we were on shore with father that we were going to make a journey through the land of the Aztecs."

"Well, and so we are, my boy."

"Who are the Aztecs?"

"Rather, who were they, for properly they are now a people of the past, just as the American Indians will become in a few generations more. The Aztecs, when

first heard of, were a great American nation who were located in Aztlan, a country lying north of the Gulf of California, where they were a flourishing and powerful people seven hundred years ago.

"In the year 1196, as has been discovered by those who have delved into their history, they migrated to Tula, remaining there but a short time, when they went to Zumpanco, about twenty years after, and finally settled on a group of islands to the south of Lake Tescuco; they were reduced to slavery by the Colhuans in 1314, and moving to the west of the lake, founded Tenochtitlan, their capital, in 1325. This last named location was on the site of the present city of Mexico, which lies only a short distance to the north of our route, so that it is perfectly proper for me to say that we are journeying through the land of the Aztecs."

"What sort of people were they?"

"Their history is one of the most interesting that I have ever studied. They were invaded by the Spanish under Cortez in 1519 and subjugated. It is the belief of the great German scholar Humboldt, who died nine years ago, that in the fifteenth century they had acquired by conquest over sixty thousand square miles of territory. They were among the most superstitious people of whom we have any knowledge, and worshiped any number of deities. They made great progress

in architecture—that is, the manner of building beautiful houses and palaces—and they cultivated poetry and oratory, if you can understand what is meant by that. They used hieroglyphics—by which I mean signs—to write their history, which our scholars have been able to study and learn the meaning of. You remember the story that I told you the other day about Montezuma?"

"Oh, yes, very well."

"Well, then, what was the story?"

"He reigned from 1502 until 1520; he had another queer name that I can't remember."

"It was his surname of Xocojotzin, or 'the younger,' and he was the ninth king of Mexico, was called Montezuma II., elected to succeed his grandfather at the date you have named—1502; and now what else can you tell me about him?"

"He was a great general, and when they made him king he was a high priest, and when he was crowned king he made his people kill a great many prisoners as a sacrifice, I think you said."

"You are right; what else?"

"He sent away from his service all the poor humble folks, and wouldn't have any persons about him but those that were of noble birth. He was at war all the time, and led such a wicked life that his health broke down, and he was almost scared to death by a comet that appeared in the sky after he had reigned ten years."

"That is right; but what was the year?"

"Let me see," replied Jack, as he began adding up on his fingers, "it must have been in, 1512, was it not?"

"Certainly; what became of Montezuma?"

"One of his neighbors, a king, told him that the comet meant that he was going to have great trouble, and that a whole lot of folks were coming from some other country, and they were going to kill him, and Montezuma was such a big dunce that he was scared more than ever. His people got so they hated him, 'cause he was so cruel to them, and, by-and-by, Cortez came along with his Spaniards——"

"What year was that?"

"1519, and Montezuma was so scared again, that he shook all over and came near falling down on his head."

"Very probably such was the fact, but I don't think I told you that," said Uncle Frede, with a smile.

"He had been scared so many times that I'm sure he must have trembled like everything when he found the Spanish soldiers were marching against him, and I know that I shake when I get scared very bad. So he went to meet Cortez and made him many presents of gold and brought him to the city, and Cortez was so mean that he made him a prisoner and put irons on his legs. But Montezuma said he would be the slave of

the Spanish king, and Cortez took the irons off and left him in charge of a man——"

"What was that general's name?"

"I can't think of it now."

"It was his General Alvarado—a very easy name to remember."

"Well, they got to fighting in the city, and while Montezuma was standing on the walls, dressed up like a king, coaxing his people to give in to the Spanards, he was hit by an arrow that one of the Mexicans fired, and before the Spaniards could cover him with their shields, he got a whack from a stone that another Mexican threw, and he wouldn't let them dress his wounds, and he wouldn't eat anything, and so he died."

"Well done!" exclaimed the uncle, who with Vega had listened with great interest to the story of the lad; "you have that history very straight and without any error; I am sure when I take you North to the United States and put you to school, you will make your mark. Well, this unfortunate Montezuma that you have been telling me about is believed to have been the last of the Aztec kings. That will do for to-day's lesson, and now if you will use your eyes you will see something worth looking at."

"I know what you mean," replied the bright-eyed boy; "that great high mountain over yonder, with the smoke coming out of the top; it must be a volcano."

"Do you know its name?"

"How should I know when I never saw or heard of it before? but hold on—let me think a minute."

The lad put in this proviso, because the guide Vega at that moment stepped forward as if he was about to pick something from the ground, but whispered in his ear so as to give him the clue.

"Of course, what was I thinking about?" said Jack. "You want me to tell you the name of the volcano; it's Popocatepetl."

Frede detected the little trick of their guide, and he was pleased, for he regarded it as a sign of friendship and interest in the boy, which he was glad to see. He feigned not to observe the action, and complimenting his nephew on his knowledge, he added a few words of information which to some extent was new to Vega himself.

"The volcanoes are a long ways off, and we shall have them in sight for many days yet, so you may as well learn all you can about that and its neighbors. Popocatepetl means 'smoking mountain,' and is 17,720 feet high. The first one who ascended that volcano was Dias Ordas, one of the officers of Cortez. Orizava, or Citlatepetl, meaning 'the mountain of the star,' is about five hundred feet less in height. If we approach nigh enough, you will see a magnificent forest around its base, with the pines growing further and further

apart as you ascend until they disappear altogether. Above them are the glaciers forever gleaming in the sun, and finally the snow surrounding the crater, at so great a height that it never melts."

"Has anybody ever climbed to the top of it?"

"Hundreds of people; I went up with a party two years ago."

"I have been up many times," added Vega, the guide. "Can you tell me who was the first man that made the ascent?"

"It was Monsieur Doignon, a Frenchman, who climbed to the top in 1847," said Frede, whose mind was well stored with the most interesting facts regarding not only the country through which they were traveling, but relating to almost all sections of the globe.

When he found that Vega was as desirous of hearing what he had to tell about the different parts of the earth, it was natural that the gentleman should improve every suitable occasion to add to their store of knowledge, and the conversation frequently became so absorbing that the guide forgot for the time the duties of his position, and stumbled and lost his way in a fashion that caused Jack endless amusement.

At the end of the three days' service, when they were far beyond sight of the great ocean, which they had left behind them, Alfredo had dismissed all traces of the distrust which troubled him at first regarding this

man, and henceforth the journey was made in full confidence of the guide, who was destined on so many occasions to have the safety of the other two in his hands.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, as they were making their way from the upper regions into the warmer climate of the lower level, the sun, which had been shining so uninterruptedly ever since they had left the coast, became obscured, and the wind, that had been blowing gently all the afternoon, became more violent, occasionally rising into gusts that resembled the squalls frequently encountered on the ocean.

"I am afraid we are going to have trouble," remarked Alfredo, looking up at the darkening sky.

"Why?" asked Jack.

"There is a storm coming."

"What of that? Who's afraid?"

"I am; and so will you be when you are caught in it; you have seen some lively tempests down in Panama,but you were always able to get into some secure shelter where you were safe, but you won't be so well off here."

"There are plenty of trees and rocks, and I should think that Vega can find some place where we can get out of the wet."

"If we had nothing to fear but the wet I should be very comfortable, but then there is no use of meeting trouble half-way; no one can do more than Vega, and

he is sure to do all in his power. He has stopped asking me questions about the great desert and is attending strictly to business."

The party were now picking their way through a dense forest, where their guide was compelled to make frequent detours to avoid being stopped altogether.

There was no path, and Vega was relying mainly upon his woodcraft—which long years of practice and experience had educated up to an extraordinary degree of perfection.

So long as they were favored with the light of the sun, its position in the heavens could be used as a sort of compass while pressing their way through the trackless wilderness; but the sky was now so overcast, that the keenest eye was unable to locate the orb, and this, with the constant turnings to which the guide was forced, made the task of keeping his reckoning all the more difficult.

There was a storm coming and no mistake.

Vega, when questioned, replied that it would soon be along, and he was doing his utmost to reach a certain shelter, which he had in mind, with the prospect that he would fail altogether to accomplish the feat.

The trees about them swayed in the gale, which was constantly increasing, and the roar was like the booming of the surf upon the shore.

The followers of Vega noticed that he often stopped

and listened, as if there was some sound which he was expecting, and which he dreaded to hear.

This was done several times, when all at once the three came to a sudden pause from a rumble of appalling depth, sounding as if an avalanche was sweeping down from the mountains upon their heads.

The large, lustrous eyes of the guide took on an expression of terror, and pausing but a second, he leaped backward, caught up the lad in his arms as though he were but an infant, and shouted in a hoarse voice to Alfredo:

"Back! back! for your life! Don't wait or you are lost!"

CHAPTER XVII

A TERRIBLE DANGER

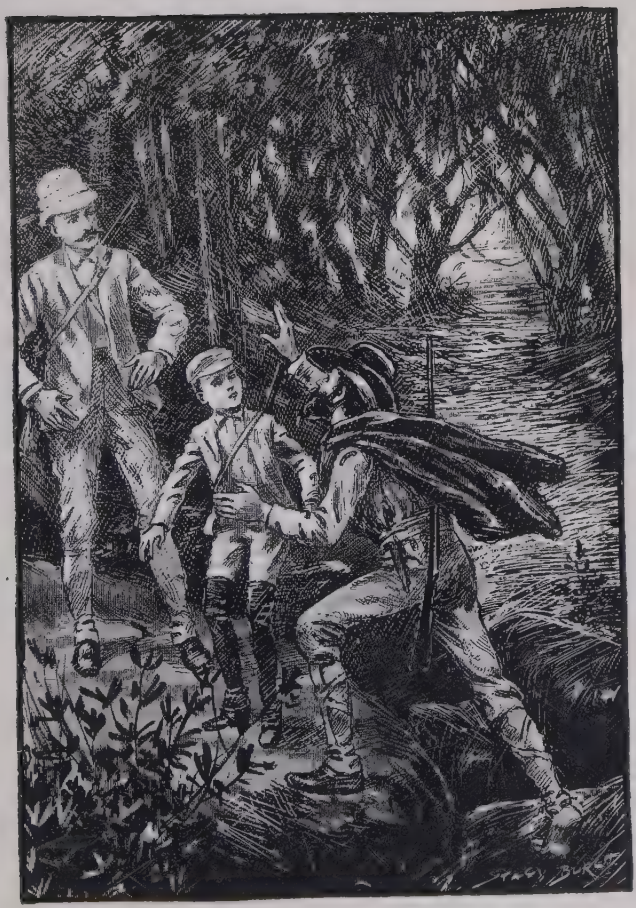
THE appearance and manner of the guide Vega when he turned around so suddenly, and, catching up little Jack, called out to his master to run for his life, betokened that the brave man, for once in his life, was filled with the most terrifying emotions.

Alfredo had been in too many situations of the gravest danger not to know the value of time in such cases; and, without pausing to ask the cause of this sudden alarm, he sprang backward and ran with all the speed at his command.

At the time of this fright, the party were making their way through a sort of narrow valley, where the descent was gradual, from the mountainous region in which they had been traveling for the last two days.

The action of the guide showed that he was in dread of something of an alarming character, but, until the moment he heard it coming, he held strong hopes that he would be able to reach some point for which he was striving, and where they all would be safe from harm.

Well-nigh he succeeded, but nevertheless failure had come, and his desperate hope was that he might retreat



"'BACK! BACK! FOR YOUR LIFE! DON'T WAIT OR YOU ARE LOST!'"—PAGE 155.

far enough to escape the appalling foe that was coming after them with the speed of a race-horse.

The roar was terrific, awakening such fear in the mind of the listener as came with the rush and rage of the body of water which swept from Mill River on that beautiful day when so many saw the sun rise for the last time.

The sky was filled with black, flying clouds, some of inky blackness, around and among which the crimson lightning quivered and darted like fiery serpents. The thunder was continuous, but not accompanied by those ear-splitting detonations which frequently mark a storm in the tropics. It was rather a constant rumble and booming, such as suggested the rolling of chariot-wheels over the courts of heaven. The wind was strong, but not particularly violent. There was a swaying of trees, and some of the branches and limbs of large size went skurrying by over the heads of the fleeing fugitives.

It was evident that the tremendous rush and roar was not caused by the agencies named. There was something more—something to be held in greater fear than any and all to which we have referred.

Little Jack was borne in the arms of the swarthy, muscular native, whose progress was no more impeded thereby than if he were but the tiniest sort of infant.

Jack's position was such that as he was carried along

in this fashion, his face was turned so that he looked backward and saw the track over which they were hurrying in such haste and fear.

The boy marked the wreck and ruin of vegetation which followed, and indeed surrounded, them, but he was not specially alarmed, and was on the point of insisting that Vega should let him get down and run along with them, when the gloom behind them was illuminated by a more vivid flash than had been seen heretofore, and through the swaying limbs and flying vegetation he saw something gleam like the reflection of the moonlight from the surface of a frozen stream.

He was puzzled and at a loss to understand what it meant, and, without speaking, he kept his face turned in that direction, in the hope of solving the problem so soon as the next flash should come.

It came a minute later, and the conditions were so favorable that the mystery was made clear on the instant. Indeed, the sense of feeling would have told him the truth, even if he were deprived of the use of his eyes.

While Vega was making his way through the ravine in desperate haste to reach a place of safety, he was apprised that a torrent of water was ahead of him, and was rushing up the valley to meet him.

The ravine, as is often the case among the mountains of all countries, served as a sort of reservoir, into which a hundred streams poured with such impetuosity that

the main channel was swelled to irresistible proportions in an instant, as it may be said. Such was the foe which sprang up like a tiger in the path of the daring guide, compelling him to turn about and run for his life.

When Jack Winch caught sight of this muddy, turbulent torrent, it was at the very heels of his friend, and rushing forward with such speed as far to exceed the fleetness of the runner.

"Oh, Vega!" called out the terrified lad, "there's a river chasing us! What shall we do?"

The native made no answer, except to continue his tremendous exertions, which it would seem ought to have carried him beyond the reach of all harm, and which had already brought him close to the heels of Alfredo, who was no laggard in his movements.

The ground was so ascending that the flight of the two men was of the most exhausting character, but at the same time, it would seem that that very fact ought to have operated in their favor, in the way of lifting them beyond the reach of the angry flood.

There was no rain falling immediately around the fugitives, nor had there been any during the day, so that there was reason to hope that this fierce overflow would speedily spend itself.

But Jack had scarcely uttered his cry, when the water made a surge forward, and, the next instant, was

around the sinewy legs of the iron-limbed native, who labored forward with heroic resolve.

"Don't stop!" he called out to Alfredo, fearful that the man would give up in despair so soon as he should feel the cold clasp of the waters about his limbs—"don't stop! we have only a short ways further to go!"

Alfredo had no intention of giving up, as he showed by the "spurt," in which he threw all his power and energy.

"Hold fast to the boy!" he shouted back, his words sounding faint and far away, although no more than a dozen feet separated the two men.

No fear of the swarthy native loosing his hold of the lad; for, with that peculiarity often shown in that direction by those of his class, he had already formed the strongest kind of affection for the boy, and was ready to imperil his life for him at any time.

As he heard the cry of the alarmed uncle, the native reached one arm back and closed it around the legs of the youth, so as to prevent his losing his anchorage in the dreadful uproar in which they were almost immediately involved.

Jack was peering into the gloom, which was now almost like that of night itself, on the watch for the next glimpse of the flood, when something struck him in the face, nearly taking away his breath.

It was the water tossed by some obstruction, which threw it clean over the head of the brave Vega.

Before the lad could fairly comprehend what it meant, he observed that the native was half swimming and plunging through the current, which, part of the time, was over his head, and again reached to his waist.

The torrent was borne forward like the stream which bursts from the mountain-side, throwing the guide on his hands and knees with a force that was perfectly resistless, and by which the veteran only sought to direct his course so far as possible.

The great and imminent peril was that of having his brains dashed out against some of the obstructions which were all about him.

There were trees and rocks interposed at all angles, and he was sent tumbling and pitching over them with a fury which threatened to kill both him and his charge, with the suddenness of the lightning stroke.

The confusion was already such that he and Alfredo had lost sight of each other, and were powerless to render any mutual assistance.

All that the guide strove to do was to save his own life and that of the boy, who was clinging to his back with the despairing grasp of a drowning man.

Jack had dropped his rifle, feeling that he could ask nothing more than the life of himself and his friends.

He was a remarkably good swimmer, but he knew there was no help for him except by clinging to his guide, which he did, praying to Heaven not to desert him in his great peril.

They were very nearly at the end of the ravine, and with a good prospect of escape from the peril, when the native was struck by an uprooted tree and stunned for the moment.

It was only for a moment, indeed, as by a powerful effort he regained command of himself, and renewed his struggle with his appalling foe of the darkness.

At the instant he regained his full senses he seemed to be enveloped by a sea of ice, which threatened to crush the life out of him.

And the reason was because he missed the burden from his back!

Jack Winch was gone! swept away by the same shock that had stunned Vega himself for the instant.

The powerful-limbed hunter reached up, and grasping an overhanging limb, he held on with the grip of a vise and swung himself clear above the current raging beneath.

The ascending valley had finally risen above the top of the mountain torrent, so that its violent progress was stopped altogether, and those who had saved themselves up to this point need feel no further fear, for the danger was ended.

How bitter the thought, therefore, that at the very last minute of danger, when, as may be said, they were crossing the very threshold of safety, this cruel blow should come and rob him of the boy!

As soon as Vega had gained a sustaining grip, he turned his head and peered back in the gloom, in the hope of catching sight of the struggling form of the lad. Had he been able to do so, he would have plunged in after him, no matter what opposed.

But he saw nothing of the loved form, nothing but twisting trees, and limbs and branches, which seemed to throw up their arms like human beings in torture, while the water dashed and recoiled again from the rise of land, as if angered that it should be balked of its prey at the moment it was within its grasp.

One quick, penetrating glance told the native that the boy was not within sight, and he called out in a voice that rung like a trumpet above the roar of the tempest:

"Jack! Jack! where are you? Answer me, and I will come to you! Keep up a stout heart and you shall be saved!"

Vega spoke with a broken accent, but the lad would have recognized his words had they reached his ears, as Vega himself well knew, and he listened with an eager anxiety which can hardly be imagined.

But the strained ear was unable to catch any sound save that of the tempest, which had raged so long that it seemed like silence itself, and through which the clear musical voice of the youth would have pierced like the notes of the cremona from among the crash and blare of a hundred inferior instruments.

The tempest alone gave answer, and once more the hunter called out with a power that was amazing.

Rising as it did above the din and roar of the tempest, it would have suggested to the hearer that the Storm King himself was abroad on this night, and awakening the echoes among the mountains and rocks around.

But the second call produced not the response desired, and then Vega was silent, for he knew it was useless to call any more; but, as despair was settling over his heart, an answer came—one he was glad to hear, though it was not that for which he yearned.

It was the voice of Alfredo, but a short distance above him.

He had succeeded in reaching a safe perch, and was looking back for his friends, scarcely doubting their safety, when the sound of Vega's voice fell upon his ear.

When the call was repeated, an unspeakable dread filled the heart of the man, and he shouted back to the guide.

"What is amiss, good Vega? What ill has befallen Jack!"

"He has gone, the saints only know where! Oh, woe is me if he is not found!"

The native was continuing his lamentation, when Alfredo, who had caught the situation from the few

words uttered, dropped down from his perch, and caught upon that of the guide.

"Tell me what you mean," he said catching his arm and peering through the gloom in the dusky face of his friend; "where is the boy?"

"You know how the waters and the flood came; he was on my back, holding like the brave fellow he is, and I was almost to a place of safety, where we could have laughed at the raging torrent, when a tree, sent by Satan himself, struck my head, and my senses were gone for the instant. When they came back to me the lad had vanished, and I am afraid we shall never look upon the noble face again. Ah! woe is me! I shall die!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SEARCH

THE grief of the guide Vega over the loss of the boy Jack Winch was so unfeigned and demonstrative that it unfitted him entirely for anything looking toward a vigorous rescue of the boy.

Desperate as was the hope, Alfredo, the uncle, was not in complete despair.

He was not prepared to yield up the little fellow until there was no doubt that he had gone down in the rush and swirl of water which played with the two men like a cat with mice, until a kind Providence extricated them from its power.

If little Jack was really swallowed up by that fierce and mysterious mountain-torrent—but he determined he would not think of the awful probability until it should become a certainty.

"Come, Vega, rouse yourself! Be a man!" called out Alfredo, shaking him violently by the arm. "I have hope that the boy has managed to save himself, and you will let him perish while you are bemoaning his fate and doing nothing to avert it."

This call had the effect of rousing the native, and

he ceased his lamentations on the instant, and by a curious anomaly of this human nature of ours, he became for a few seconds the dependent and servant, inferior to the man whom he had set out to guide through the great stretch of mountain and wilderness.

"What can we do?" he asked, in the tone of a slave at the feet of his master.

"We can try and find him; he may have seized some of these branches that are floating all around him."

"He ought to have heard my voice when I called so loud to him."

"And it may have reached his ears, too much filled with water, and too much deafened by terror to take heed of the call. The torrent which has followed us so savagely this far has stopped and turned back, finding we have escaped. Perhaps it carried him with it. Then, too, by the flashes of lightning, I observe that it turns aside into a dozen different channels, into any one of which he may have been borne to some secure spot, where he will await the coming of morning and of Vega, who should be a man and not a boy."

This pointed speech produced a remarkable effect upon the mountaineer, who instantly aroused himself from his moral collapse and became himself again.

"There is some truth in what you say," remarked the guide, as his mind regained its wonted tone; "but the chances are against the escape of the lad; when I

had all that I could do to save myself, it is not reasonable to think that a boy could do better."

"Not if the conditions were the same; indeed, if you and he were called upon to encounter the same peril, of course he would go under, but this frightful danger in which we were caught was not governed by law, else I would have succumbed too. The collision which separated you and him may not have injured him in the least, and it is not impossible that he got out of the reach of the torrent with greater ease than did you or I; but, Vega, I know how the chances point the other way. There is a terrible fear at my heart, which I can only partially subdue by work; let us, therefore, do anything rather than stand here with hands folded."

The conditions were unfavorable for anything like a thorough search.

Night had just settled over the wilderness, and the darkness was impenetrable, excepting when lit up by the playing lightning.

The latter was steadily decreasing, and was likely to cease altogether in a short time.

The water was everywhere, in gullies, holes and hollows, where it lay cold and still, waiting, like some foe in ambush, for its victims to come along and drop into its embrace.

The neighborhood, from the necessity of the case,

must be totally unfamiliar to the guide so long as he was deprived of the light of the sun, which would enable him to locate leading landmarks.

It would be impossible for the most skillful mountaineer to make himself so well acquainted with such a vast country that he could identify himself at night in any part of it.

The situation was one in which the eyes were of little or no service to any one.

Neither of the two, in fact, expected to accomplish anything with their unaided vision until the sun should rise to assist in the search. At intervals the resonant voice of Vega rang through the stillness of the woods, and again and again the despairing and yet hopeful hunters paused and listened, in the belief that possibly there would come to them a reply from the depths of the wilderness.

When nothing but the rush and roar of the tempest and torrent were sent back to them, the terrible probability forced itself upon the desperate Alfredo, who recalled the picture of that happy mother in the home by the Pacific, waiting for the return of her rosy-cheeked boy, who had left her in such bounding spirits; and he saw, too, the grizzled old sea-captain, whose love for the lad was greater than for his own life, as he awaited the return of the one to whom he had intrusted the little fellow; but, when he had reached this point in the dark

imaginings, he drew his mind away by an almost superhuman effort, and vowed that the boy was *not* dead, and he *would* find him and take him to his home, alive and well.

It would be hardly worth our while to dwell upon the search, which was continued without intermission through the entire night, the guide using his powerful voice with unfailing strength, but there came back nothing bearing the slightest resemblance to a reply from the lost one.

It would have required no very experienced judge of human nature to see that the native had given over all hope of finding him alive, although, seeing the desperation of his relative, he avoided making known his belief.

Long before midnight the rumbling thunder became quiet and the lightning was seen no more, so that the darkness was unrelieved by the glimmer of a star. The water that had risen to such a great height fell as rapidly, and they found themselves treading, or rather picking their way over ground where the torrent was a dozen feet in depth but a short time before.

At last the gray light of morning began stealing through the wilderness, and the men were on the alert, ready to seize the first chance to prosecute the hunt with more of system than heretofore.

"The first thing necessary," said Alfredo, "is to find the place where you first missed Jack."

"Here it is."

They were standing within a dozen feet of the tree to which the guide leaped and sustained himself, immediately after missing the lad from his back.

"Now, if we follow the valley downward from here," added the relative, "we shall certainly find the boy, or some trace of him."

"You speak the truth; it can be at no great distance that he slipped from my back, and I think he will be found not far off."

It was a question with Alfredo, and which he found it hard to decide, whether the failure to discover the boy would be a favorable or unfavorable indication.

It would seem at first thought that the disappearance of the lad would give color to the hope that his dead body had been washed into some recess or unsuspected place, where it was likely to remain until the great day when all shall be awakened at the sound of the last trump.

But, as the uncle turned the matter over in his mind, he came to believe that such an issue was as likely to point to the possibility that he had succeeded in making a landing in the darkness and had wandered off beyond call.

Distracted, hopeful and despairing by turns, Alfredo pushed forward, occasionally separating some distance from Vega, who moved along with the stealth and caution of an American Indian on the trail of a foe.

Some two hundred yards down the valley, the guide suddenly halted and looked back and waited for his employer to join him.

"There is no use in going further," said the leader, as Alfredo came up.

"Why not?"

"He was on my back, holding fast, like a good fellow, when I went by this point."

"Can you be sure of that, when it was all so dark around you?"

"There were flashes of lightning that showed me where I was, and I remember the turn in the valley here."

"In that case it would seem that it is useless to go on," said Alfredo, with a desperate effort to conceal the despair that was again gnawing at his heart; "but there was a reflux of the current, which may have floated him back some distance beyond."

The guide shook his head, but replied, as if he was desirous of seizing any hope, no matter how slender:

"The thing is not impossible, and we will look further."

"He must be *somewhere*," continued the relative, "and as it is pretty clear that he is not where we have already searched, why, we have nothing to do but to look elsewhere."

To both was presented the picture of the dead body

of the lad, although each sedulously avoided all reference to the dreadful theme.

Alfredo lingered behind, for somehow or other the presentiment was strong upon him that they were close to the discovery of the truth, which it seemed could have but the one issue—that of the lifeless form of the noble lad who but a short time before was the embodiment of bounding health and spirits—full of the most buoyant anticipations of sport and enjoyment in the journey to the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

The saddened man lingered still further behind, feeling that he was not equal to the task of gazing upon the cold and lifeless form of the darling child.

"I can go no further till the whole awful truth shall become known, and that must be by him."

He paused and sat down upon a fallen tree, and contented himself with watching the figure of the guide as he moved down the valley, walking slowly and using his eyes like one who was accustomed to depend upon them alone in an emergency such as the present.

Alfredo saw him take a step or two and then pause, and after scrutinizing the ground immediately in his front, look carefully each side, so as to be sure that nothing should escape him.

When he had taken in all that was in his field of vision, he would advance another half-dozen steps and repeat the same course of action.

When this had been done several times, the watcher noticed that he gave such a sudden start that he was sure he had discovered something for which he was searching.

The guide not only stopped, but he stooped down as if to pick up an object on the ground before him.

Surely the hunt was rewarded.

He had found that for which he was searching, and which he wished not to find.

All at once Vega looked around, rising to the standing posture again.

He was now in quest of his master.

"He has found him! he has found him!" repeated Alfredo, his heart seeming to stand still; and then, with a courage which surprised even himself, he sprang up and started on a run to his friend, feeling that he was able to bear anything after what he had suffered through the night.

"He is dead! I know it, Vega!" he exclaimed, as he came running to where the guide was awaiting him.

"What are you talking about demanded his surprised companion. "It is not Jack."

"God be thanked!" was the devout prayer of the man, who could scarcely keep himself from falling to the earth. "He may still be alive."

Vega had found something, indeed, but it was only the rifle of the lad, which, it will be recalled, had slipped

from his back while he was clinging to his trusty friend.

The uncle took the weapon from the hand of the native with something of the tenderness with which he would have received a token from the dead.

The guide explained how the gun came to be there, and, with a strange revival of hope, they continued their search, this time turning back on their own steps, but moving off to one side, so as to examine new ground.

They had not gone a dozen steps, when Vega gave utterance to an exclamation of delight, and threw his hat up in the air with childish demonstrations of happiness.

"*See there! see there!*" he fairly shouted. "*The boy is alive!*"

There, on the ground before them, as plain as if carved by the hand of an artist, were seen the foot-prints which it was self-evident were made by the shoes of little Jack Winch!

CHAPTER XIX

A HAPPY MEETING

ALFREDO, the uncle of Jack Winch, was not an excitable man, but when he looked down and saw imprinted in the soft, damp earth the contour of the small shoes of the boy, his joy ran away with him.

And indeed it might well do so, for it was proof that, through the wonderful providence of God, Jack had escaped death from the flood, and was probably within a short distance of them that very minute!

As soon as the guide was through his boisterous demonstrations, he turned about and caught the hand of his employer, and the tears of joy ran down the cheeks of both.

The bound from despair to hope was so sudden and complete, that it did not occur to either of the friends that the lad might still be in peril, and indeed it was not at all improbable that he had succumbed after his deliverance from the flood.

It was enough for them to know that he was not drowned, and that the torrent which had used them so roughly was not able to crush out the life of the noble young lad.

It was several minutes before the men were able to gain the mastery of their emotions sufficiently to converse like sensible human beings, but at last Alfredo said:

"God is good, and He has not forgotten Jack; those are his footprints, and they were made since the outflow of the water, so that it is certain he has escaped death from that cause. I notice that they lead off to the left, and I wonder that he has not heard and answered your call, repeated times without number."

"I will try it again," said the guide, whereupon he sent his magnificent voice echoing through the aisles of the forest, with a power apparently sufficient to raise the dead.

As before, there was no response, and despite the joy which pervaded the hearts of both a few minutes before, a most distressing fear began making itself manifest.

"I can follow that trail to the end," said Vega, taking the most direct manner of solving the problem, "and we will soon find him, for he cannot have gone far by this time."

After leaving the soft earth in the valley, and reaching the higher ground, the footprints became invisible to Alfredo, who feared that the guide would also find himself at fault; but the fellow was accustomed to that sort of business, and although he slowed his gait, yet

he walked with the unerring certainty of a Sioux Indian when on the trail of his foe.

The pursuer spoke only now and then, but he gave it as his belief that the tracks, when first discovered, showed that the boy had landed by some means or other on the margin of the ravine, and then, as soon as it was safe for him to do so, had walked across and entered the wood on the opposite side.

This, from the nature of the case, must have taken place within the short time, and Jack, whatever might have happened, certainly was not very far off.

The best of fortune awaited the two, who were pressing forward with such high hope, not without its mixture of fear.

It was less than two hundred yards from the ravine that Vega paused, and looking over his shoulder, beckoned to Alfredo to come to his side, a command which was obeyed without a moment's hesitation.

"Do you know him?" asked the delighted mountaineer, pointing to the figure of little Jack Winch, as he was stretched out upon the ground beneath a huge tree, sound asleep.

"I think I have heard of the young gentleman before," replied the no less delighted uncle; "shall I awake him?"

"No, he needs sleep, and so do we; we will rest under the same tree, and then after that we shall feel

more like going on than we did before, and moreover, it is breakfast-time, and there can be no better place than this to take it."

While talking in guarded undertones, they had approached until they stood one on either side of the sleeping lad, whose round, rosy face showed not the least ill effects from his terrible bath and struggle in the rushing torrent.

It was hard for Uncle Frede to resist the temptation to stoop over and wake the lad and press him to his breast, but seeing that he was likely to gain more rather than lose from this rest, he acted upon the advice of Vega and left him undisturbed.

"I will procure something for food," added the guide, as he shouldered his rifle and disappeared in the woods.

Alfredo turned again to look at the beloved features of the unconscious lad, when he recoiled with a sudden exclamation of alarm.

Not more than a yard from where Jack was curled up and asleep, just as if lying in his own bed at home, was a slight excavation of the ground, in which Alfredo perceived something stir, and at the same moment detected the metallic glitter of some reptile.

His instinct, as may be said, told him that it meant danger, and had to take only a step closer when he saw that at the bottom of the cavity was coiled what is called a coral serpent.

Like all such reptiles in tropical countries, it was very venomous, and its bite was to be avoided with as much care as that of the cobra or the rattlesnake. It seemed to be restless and disturbed, as if angered at the proximity of the lad whom it was making ready to attack, when the appearance of a new-comer drew its attention toward him.

Alfredo did not stand on ceremony, but catching up a stick which lay near, he dealt the serpent a blow which wounded it unto death.

The reptile roused itself like lightning, and attempted to stand upon one end, while its jaws were extended and the tongue darted in and out in a way that showed how eager it was to inflict its poisonous bite. A second blow, however, finished him, and after some whipping and threshing it became still and dead.

The traveler had seen these curious reptiles before, but their peculiar appearance always interested him, and drawing forth the serpent with the stick which had killed it, he flung it some distance away from the lad, and then examined it with the same curiosity which he felt when he met it for the first time.

The specimen which lay before him was nearly a yard in length, with a skin of deep crimson, regularly encircled by rings of jetty blackness. The flesh of the serpent is a favorite with the Indians of the tropics, but Alfredo shared the prejudice which seems natural

to "the seed of the woman," and through fear that Vega might want to utilize the present specimen, it was flung far away and beyond reach.

This was scarcely done, when, as the man turned about to seat himself on the ground near the boy, the latter raised up, wide awake as ever, and looking straight at his relative:

"How are you, Uncle Frede?"

"God be thanked!" exclaimed the man, as he impulsively pressed the boy to his heart, "you were lost and you are found; you were dead and you are alive again."

"I don't see how that is," said Jack, disposed to take things literally. "I didn't know that I had been dead very lately."

"To us you were, and the gratitude of our hearts is the same; we have hunted all night, and this morning, and when we were ready to give you up as dead, we came upon the tracks which told us you were alive, and not very far away. We followed your trail until we found you asleep under this tree. Vega has gone off to get something for breakfast, and while he is away I would like to hear how it was that you escaped death from the torrent, when all the chances seemed to be against you and it was such hard work for us?"

"I guess it was about the same with me as with you and Vega. It was God who took care of me when I

gave everything up and was sure that I should be killed. Oh, there's my rifle!" exclaimed Jack, catching sight of his gun leaning against the tree behind him. "Where did that come from?" he asked, springing to his feet and taking it in his hand.

His uncle replied that they found it in the ravine, evidently near the place where it had slipped from his grasp when clinging to the back of his friend.

"It went from you just as you went from Vega, and why you did so is what I should like you to tell me."

"Why, I hung fast, uncle, as long as there seemed a chance to save myself, but by-and-by there came a tree or something which hit Vega an awful whack, so that he went under water. I thought he was killed, so I let go, and looked out for myself."

"You seem to have succeeded very well," said Frede, admiring the pluck of the little fellow, "and I suppose the best thing you could do was done, but what befell you afterward?"

"The good Lord befriended me, as mother tells me He always does; I couldn't see anything and didn't know where I was, but I hadn't forgot how to swim, and I did my best. The minute I struck out, I hit against a tree, and grabbed hold of that; then I pitched over something and was kind of dazed from the rushing way things went about me, but I held fast to whatever came in my way, and knew God would bring me

through. I can't tell how it happened, but when something struck me again, my wits were all gone for awhile, and when I came to, I was lying with my feet out of water, and my head and shoulders on the land, so the river couldn't do any more hurt to me. I was pretty well banged up, and I feel sore yet, but I was all right and crawling up so far that there was no more fear from the water, I went to sleep and never woke up till the sun was shining."

"That shows why it was you did not reply to the call of Vega, which must have been repeated a hundred times."

"I never heard him; when the day came I felt stiff, wet, tired, and hungry, so I started out to hunt you up. I didn't go far when I found that it was hard work to travel when your clothing is wet, so I lay down under the tree to wait for it to dry, and got asleep before I knew it, but I have had enough now to last me a week, and will keep watch while you and Vega catch up."

"We need it, and will be glad to avail ourselves of your offer. It seems to me that we have been favored in a marked manner, for all three of us were placed in the most imminent peril, and yet Providence brought us through them all."

"That is what I think," added Jack, in a serious voice, "and I have thanked Him many times; but I am hungry; isn't it pretty near time that Vega got back?"

"I am looking for him; there goes his gun."

"It seems to be a good ways off."

"It must be a considerable distance. This is a strange country, for though it abounds with all manner of animal and vegetable life, yet there are times when a hunter has the hardest kind of work to get enough meat for a single meal. If any one understands this wilderness it is Vega, and yet he has been compelled to go a long way to find what we need."

While waiting for the return of the guide, the two friends busied themselves in examining their guns and putting them in a condition for any emergency. Though both had been subjected to some severe usage, neither was injured, and after drawing and renewing the charges, they were as they should be.

Vega having fired his rifle, his friends expected his return within a reasonable time, but a full hour came and went, and nothing was seen or heard of him.

"I guess he missed his shot," said Jack, "or has only wounded the creature, and has to chase it a long ways, and maybe has fallen down and hurt himself, and broke his gun, and lost all his powder and caps and bullets, and——"

"There, there," interrupted Alfredo, "you have put in enough theories, and we'll wait till we hear from Vega himself."

Time passing and the guide failing to put in an appearance, the man and boy started on a little hunt of

their own, in the hope of finding some of the squirrels or rats upon which they had already feasted several times. They had scarcely started when the ground suddenly gave way beneath Jack, who had run ahead, and his uncle leaped forward, grasping his arm in time to save his going down below his depth.

"It is the work of the *tuza*," said Alfredo, retreating a few steps, still holding the arm of the boy as if he feared that injury was likely to befall him before he could get away.

CHAPTER XX

IN A TROPICAL FOREST

When Alfredo had drawn his nephew back several yards from the yawning cavity in the earth, he paused, and the two were silent a moment while they used their eyes as best they could, with a view of learning whether there was any more immediate danger.

Jack was pretty well scared, for he did not understand how it all came about.

He was walking along, when, all at once, the ground gave way beneath him, as if he had stepped upon a thin shell forming the roof of some immense subterranean cave.

"It is the work of the *tuza,*" repeated the uncle, with some impatience in his voice and manner.

"And what is the *tuza?*" asked Jack. "Is he some man that lives under the ground, and digs caves to make people fall in and break their necks, and then get up and feel so mad that they would like to see him and lick him."

"Your description might be worse, though instead of being a man it is the Mexican mole, which the natives call the *tuza,* and which is the terror of the agri-

culturists of the country. He is about the size of a plump rat. They dig under the ground in such a peculiar way that no one can tell where they are until the surface suddenly gives way and down you go out of sight."

"Did you ever know anyone to be harmed by their tricks?"

"I have; the party which I accompanied two years ago dropped into one of these underground traps, all of us going down together. The horses struggled so savagely in their terror, that two of them were killed, and one of the servants was hurt so bad that he afterward died. The great nuisance of the business is that no one gets the slightest warning of what is coming until it is too late to save himself. The wonder was that I didn't go down with you. I only wish I could gain a chance at one of the creatures," added Alfredo, as he stole cautiously toward the cavity, with his hand upon the trigger of his rifle.

"You want to punish him,"

"No; I want to eat him——"

He cut short his own words by quickly raising his rifle and firing into the opening.

"I hit him," exclaimed the marksman, with some glee in his voice, for he was hungry, "and now we shall have breakfast sure, even though it be a late one."

Reaching down into the hole, he managed to draw

out the *tuza*, which was quite a large one, and was found to be in excellent condition.

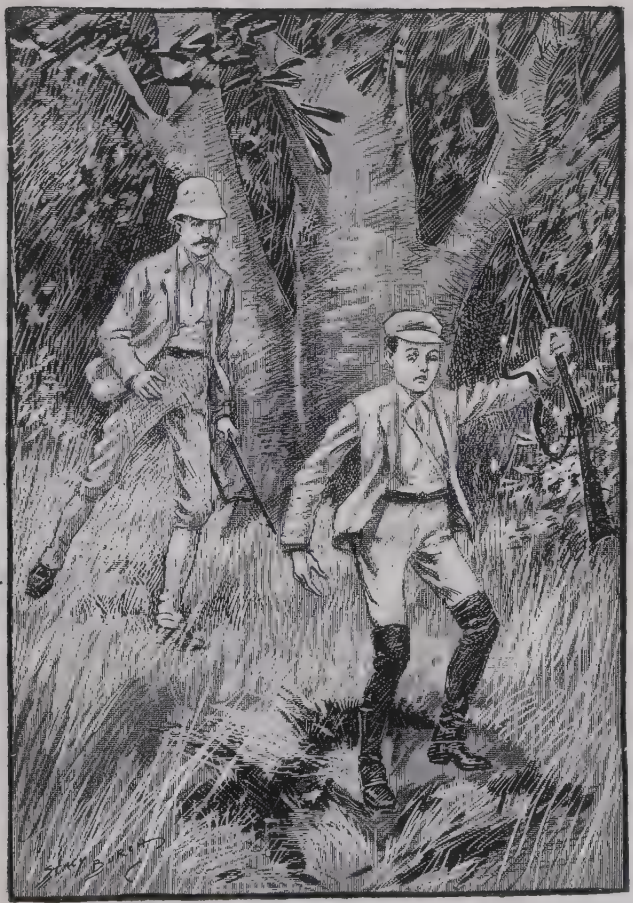
"Now when Vega comes back we will be ready for him; just gather a few sticks, Jack, so that there will be no delay, while I am dressing the creature, which, like all other pests in this world, has some useful purpose to serve."

The fire was no more than fairly under way, when Vega the guide came softly to view, carrying in his hand an ugly little animal, with a dark-brown coat, short feet, ears and eyes so small that they were scarcely distinguishable, a mouth well supplied with a set of knife-like incisors, while a pouch on each side of its jaw was filled to bursting with earth.

The guide greeted Jack very warmly, and while preparing the *tuza* which he had shot, he drew out from the lad his story, and told him how it was that the shock received from the tree was the cause of his losing his grasp upon his young friend.

Vega's garments were well covered with the soil, and he admitted that while he was out on his hunt for game of some kind, he had dropped through from the surface of the earth into a cavity some ten or twelve feet in depth, and it required no little scratching to extricate himself.

Somehow or other, game did not seem to be plenty in that neighborhood on that morning, which was why he was so long absent.



"THEY HAD SCARCELY STARTED WHEN THE GROUND SUDDENLY GAVE WAY BENEATH JACK."—PAGE 185.

It required but a few minutes to broil the Mexican moles, which were found to be very pleasant eating, despite the prejudice one would be apt to feel against them.

Indeed, some years ago they were in such demand that they were sold quite extensively in the Indian markets.

The meal finished, Vega and Alfredo stretched out upon the ground, for the purpose of gaining a portion of the sleep of which both stood in such need.

Jack was told to act the part of sentinel over his slumbering companions, and he promised that no harm should come to them if it was in his power to keep it off.

For a time it was a very easy matter to play the part of watcher over the two men, and the lad was filled with the importance of the task intrusted to him.

But Jack having secured all the slumber he required for twenty-four hours to come, soon became restless, as is always the case with one of his age when he is desired to remain still.

"They'll sleep for two hours, and maybe more," he said to himself, in thinking over the business, "and what's the use of my sitting here all the time like a stick of wood? Why, there isn't any use at all, and I'll take a peep around to see whether there isn't anything worth looking at. This is a wonderful country,

and I may lose a great deal by doing nothing, for as soon as they wake up, they will start ahead again and keep traveling till night."

He was firmly resolved that nothing should induce him to wander beyond call of his friend, and when the powerful voice of the guide is remembered, it will be seen that the boy allowed himself ample exploring room.

Our friends had already penetrated so far into the wilderness, that they were sure of meeting with wonders almost at every step, and thus it was that the lad had gone but a short distance from the camp, when his attention was arrested by a nest of *scolopendrae,* known more commonly as the centipede. The creatures, as soon as they saw a stranger looking down upon them, rolled up into something resembling balls.

They were a half dozen in number, and were of a pale-blue color.

Not knowing what they were, Jack, after some hesitation, picked up a couple and held them in the hollow of his hand.

They lay motionless for a minute or so, and then began slowly unrolling themselves, until their whole length was shown.

They were no more than a couple of inches long, and were provided with two rows of feet, making altogether something like forty of these useful, but, in the present case, superfluous appendages.

Fortunately for the boy, the species which he held in his hand did not belong to a poisonous class, although some of them, as is well-known, are among the most venomous insects found.

They had been hatched but a short time, and as yet possessed but a few rings.

These increase with the age of the creature, and become so hard that they serve as an armor to the *scolopendrae,* which by many are considered as forming the line of demarcation that separates insects from crustaceans, and the centipede is not a very distant relation of the lobster.

Near at hand the young explorer observed a worm, that, as was afterward explained to him, was the *iulus.*

Happening to take this in his hand also, it emitted a secretion of a sickening odor, and he dropped it without ceremony.

When the boy was tired of examining these not uninteresting specimens of tropical animal life, he passed on further, taking care to look back and make sure that he was not straying too far away.

The woods were still, and there was no trace of the violent storm which had raged in this vicinity but a few hours before.

When he had gone some two hundred yards further, he halted, and came to the conclusion that he had penetrated as far as was prudent.

"When they wake up and find out that I am gone, Vega will set up a yell which I'll be sure to hear, but uncle won't like it if I go too far, and I'd like to get back before they open their eyes."

He was quite sure that he still had more than an hour at his command, and so he ventured a little further, walking very slowly and measuring every step, as it may be said.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he came to a halt before some bushes of a denser growth than any he had seen since the rising of the sun. "There is something here that it will pay a fellow to look at."

This observation was caused by detecting upon a bush a number of insects of very peculiar shape.

Their form, indeed, may be set down as beyond description, since they were without regularity or symmetry. They looked as if some goodly-sized insect had exploded into fragments, no two of which were of the same pattern.

They were twisted into crosses, stars, broken rings and a mixture of the three, so curiously shaped that no one would have suspected them of possessing life, but for the fact that they displayed great activity.

The insects which had excited the wonder of Jack, he found afterward, belonged to the *hemeptera* family. resembling in some respects both the bug and grasshopper. They are without mandibles or jaws, and

their mouth is a sort of beak, the termination of a jointed tube which runs along the breast. They are quite numerous in many parts of Mexico.

The boy was still looking at the specimens in his palm, when they suddenly hopped off and vanished with such nimbleness that he failed in his attempt to arrest or catch them.

But there were others on the same bush, and he was in the act of securing them when his attention was again drawn to a number of altogether different objects. He had seen them before, and knew them as the dragon-fly, frequently called by the natives the *devil's horse,* and not the least beautiful of the innumerable insects found in the warm regions of the globe.

They have bright eyes of a greenish hue, with a yellow body, and wings speckled with black and crimson. The wings are four in number, of a gauzy texture and streaked with veins. They first appear on the water, in the form of larva, and continue that existence for a year. They are among the most voracious of all insects, and when seized attempt to sting the hand which imprisons them.

The shrub containing the specimens mentioned was found to hold in another place a different representation of the wealth of the animal kingdom, in the shape of a blue lizard, with a green back and mouth, and sides of a violet color.

"I never saw the like of you before," mused Jack, after studying it awhile, "and being as the others didn't hurt me, I don't believe that there is any danger that—Oh, murder!"

He had no more than grasped it between his fingers, when it complimented him with a bite that stung like a needle, and he dropped it with great promptness, leaping about and shaking his hand, under the belief that the insect was poisonous; but as the pain gradually decreased and there was no swelling, his fear also went down.

It was natural and boylike that he should seek to revenge himself upon the lizard, by crushing it for its impertinence, but the little creature was too nimble and eluded him.

As there seemed to be nothing left for him to inspect in this particular locality, Jack ventured still further from the camp, not forgetting to look back and survey the path over which he had come.

"It ain't more than a half hour, if it's that much, since I left the folks, and they are still dreaming, so it won't do any harm to go a little ways ahead; but I'll stop in a few minutes and go back."

The sound of insects was in the air all the time, and as the day was quite warm and sultry, Jack made up his mind that their elevation was much less than he supposed when they were overtaken by the torrent in the ravine.

When he had walked to the tree which he marked as the utmost limit of his excursion, he stopped to look around a minute or two before returning.

"Here is a better place than where they are to take a rest—Hello! there's some more of them plagued snakes!"

Directly under the tree toward which he was making his way were seen not one, but three serpents, stretched out as if they enjoyed the shade more than the sunshine—a preference rarely if ever seen among such reptiles.

Those which arrested the attention of Jack were what is known as the golden snake, which is held in great dread by the natives. The statues of the Aztec God of War, the great Huitzilipochtli, had their foreheads bound with the golden snake.

Jack stood several minutes surveying them with fear, when, to his consternation, the largest began gliding toward him, and the boy made up his mind that the time had come for him to leave those parts.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HAUNTED ISLAND

WHEN a boy catches sight of a formidable serpent gliding toward him, he generally makes the best time at his command in leaving that section; and so it was, when Jack saw the golden snake start he gave a cry of terror, and started for camp as fast as his legs could travel.

It was as natural that he should keep himself informed as to the relative speed of the pursuer and pursued, and as he ran, he continually looked over his shoulder to make sure that the horrid reptile was not at his heels. The snake, being down among the grass, was not readily seen, and the fugitive was striving the best he knew how to obtain a glimpse of him when he caught his foot in some obstruction, and fell headlong to the ground.

As he scrambled to his feet, he was sure the frightful reptile was ready to strike, but as he glanced behind him again nothing of it was to be seen.

"I guess he got scared and went back," thought the lad, his courage reviving to a great extent, "and why didn't I remember that I had my gun with me? I'll teach him how to try and bite me."

Thereupon he started back over his own trail, advancing with the greatest caution, and keeping both eyes open for his enemy.

Not until the young explorer was near the tree again did he catch sight of the reptile, which had followed him but a few rods.

It did not flee upon his approach, but lay in its coil, with its head elevated some six inches from the centre, as if to show that it was ready for its foe.

This golden serpent possesses a terrible beauty, its body being of a bright yellow, with green spots, and long thin black lines running from head to tail.

Jack paused at a safe distance, and with a view of making his aim sure, he knelt down and rested his small rifle on one knee, and sighted at the head of the reptile.

The boy was trembling a little from his fright and sudden exertion, but he was fortunate; and, when he pulled the trigger, the bullet could not have struck the head more fairly, shattering it so utterly that the stump only remained.

The body instantly began a furious thrashing and writhing, and the marksman retreated a few steps, through fear that the reptile would reach him in its dying struggles.

"There! I guess you won't bother any more boys that ain't trying to do you any harm," remarked Jack, as he proceeded to reload his weapon, keeping his eye

in the meantime on the others, which showed restlessness over what had taken place.

They did not seek to disturb the boy, however, who came to look upon himself as a sort of conqueror; and, after waiting a few minutes longer, so as to give them a chance to take up the battle, if so inclined, he turned about and started on his return to camp.

He had been gone much longer than he supposed, and when he reached the spot where he had left his friends asleep, he found both awake, and inclined to wonder as to what had become of him.

They had heard the discharge of his gun, and were on the point of going to see whether any harm had befallen him.

Jack quickly told his adventure, and said that he had taken pains not to wander so far away that he was likely to meet with any difficulty in returning to camp.

"You have been fortunate," said his uncle, "but I will be better pleased if you do not get up any more expeditions on your own account. Little boys of your age, no matter how brave, or how well able to use their guns, are very apt to run into trouble from which their friends cannot always extricate them."

Jack promised that he would do nothing of the kind again, and as the forenoon was quite advanced, the little party resumed their journey toward the northeast.

The weather was still warm and they proceeded with great deliberation, so as not to exhaust themselves unnecessarily, and with a view of husbanding their strength for the long journey that still remained before them.

The afternoon was well gone when they made their way slowly up a gradually ascending ground, beyond which there was visible a lofty peak of mountains.

But they were in a country of mountains, ravines, gullies, cañons, and the most rugged kind of scenery.

Vega the guide maintained his position some distance in advance of the others; and, as there was no danger apprehended more than that which threatens the most careful traveler at all times in tropical countries, they proceeded with a certain indifference, which their experience had given to the child as well as the man.

Vega was all of a hundred yards ahead, and had reached some rocks a rod or two above his companions, when the latter saw him halt, and standing upright, gaze long and earnestly ahead, as if he had made a most important and interesting discovery.

"What do you s'pose it is, uncle?" asked Jack, halting and looking at the fellow, who appeared lost in contemplation.

"Nothing very dangerous, I am sure, or he would make some signal to us to go on or turn back."

"Shall I yell at him?"

"Why do that, when we can make our way alongside of him and see for ourselves what it means? Come on."

A few minutes after, they clambered up the ascent until they placed themselves alongside the guide, when they saw at once that there was good cause for his absorbing interest.

They were standing on a sort of plateau, which spread out before them into an expanse of several miles in every direction.

The most of this was water—clear, calm, and without the least ripple.

It was one of the most beautiful lakes which Alfredo had ever encountered in all his travels.

As near as they could judge—and they were not far out of the way—it was some four or five miles in length, and with a width scarcely less.

The water had a clear, pure color, with an emerald tint, which makes Otsego, in New York, so attractive. The reputation that the lake bore among the guides, at least with Vega, was that it had no bottom.

Attempts, he declared, had been made to measure its depth, but at a distance of only a few rods from shore the longest line that was ever dropped failed to touch bottom.

"Being among these mountains," said Alfredo, "it is natural that it should have some portions of great

depth, but it isn't likely that it reaches through to the other side."

The guide looked at the speaker as if he was not sure what he meant.

"But that ain't the strangest thing about it," said Vega, in a voice which was meant to signify that he was the possessor of some great secret.

"Let us hear what it is," said Frede, in the most persuasive tone he could assume.

He intended it as a concession to the superior knowledge of their indispensable guide.

The latter, by way of reply, pointed to a small wooded island,which stood very near the centre of the lake.

This little patch of land was suggestive of a bouquet resting on the surface of the water, and would have recalled the beautiful Lakes of Killarney to one who had seen them.

The island was small, containing a half dozen acres, perhaps, but no more.

The sides rose steep from the water to a height of a dozen feet, and in the centre the middle portion was about twice as high.

The island was covered with a peculiar vegetation, none of it consisting of trees, with plenty of rocks, and shrubbery and undergrowth.

Alfredo and Jack scrutinized it for some time

through the telescope, but could distinguish nothing very marked about it.

When the survey was completed, the man turned to the guide, who, with his arms folded, was still looking out upon the scene like one entirely lost in contemplation.

"Vega, it is a romantic picture; it is one of the most beautiful lakes I ever saw, and the little island in the centre could not have been more charming. But you have intimated that there is something strange about the island itself. Pray, what is it?"

Never was the face of the guide more serious and composed than when he made the answer:

"That is *Haunted Island.*"

"I never heard of the place before."

"There are a great many places signor has never heard of or seen," was the withering response of the guide, who was not going to permit any legend of his to be trampled on in that manner.

"You are right; if I was not certain that there was much for me to learn I would not have ventured on so dangerous a journey as this. But tell me how long has it been haunted?"

"Always."

"That is a long time, and it has a respectable age, beyond question."

"All who live within hundreds of miles have heard

of the *Haunted Island,*" was the dignified addendum of Vega.

"But tell me further, Vega, since you are familiar with it, in what way these evidences of the place being haunted are shown. Have you ever been on the island?"

The fellow looked scared that any one should ask him such a question as that.

"Nobody would dare to do that; nobody *has* ever done it; it would be sure death to do so."

His employer laughed.

"If no one has ever set foot on this island, how do you know that it is certain death?"

The guide shrugged his shoulders, but his conviction was not shaken.

A man's pet prejudices are not to be laughed down in that style.

"The attempt has been made, and there was a time when the men went so near that they saw it would be death to go further."

This rather ingenious extrication of himself from a corner pleased Alfredo, who had no wish to place the guide in an embarrassing position.

"That's a different matter," he said, as if greatly relieved to hear it cleared up; "but, the place being haunted, tell me in what way it shows itself."

"A good many ways, and not so many, either."

"Have you ever seen any evidences of it?"

"Yes, I have."

This was uttered with the positive conviction of one who knew the truth of what he said.

"In what way—what was the peculiar appearance?"

"It was along here at night, and without knowing the first time that it was the Haunted Island that I was looking upon, strange voices came to me across the lake—voices that were those of spirits, and which I had never heard before or in any other place."

"Did you see anything strange?"

"That I did; there were forms, too, of spirits which I saw floating in the air off over the lake, and some of them came close to the shore where I was standing, so frightened that I could not stir hand or foot."

This declaration of the guide took away the little faith that Alfredo was beginning to feel in the singular characteristic of the place, and he was convinced that the fellow had been listening to some absurd rumor or legend of the Haunted Island, and had taken it all in as greedily as if it were some history of the saint upon whom he had fixed his hopes of eternal life.

He thought he would question him a little further before coming to the conclusion that the fellow was mistaken in every particular.

Accordingly he asked him as to the length of time

since he had seen this wonderful sight, what the manifestations consisted of, and what was the theory to account for this place being haunted.

The responses to these were about what he expected.

The island, he repeated, had *always* been haunted, there were strange sights seen, and wonderful sounds heard on the shores of the lake, such as no mortal had ever seen or heard before.

The former consisted of the figures of spirits floating in the air above the island and lake, many of which Vega had looked upon himself, and the sounds were those of the sweetest music to which mortals had ever listened.

CHAPTER XXII

A LONELY ENCAMPMENT

Alfredo Alfiero listened to the singular stories which Vega, the guide, told about the Haunted Island with a certain interest which such accounts never excited in him before.

He was a man devoid of superstition, and always turned an incredulous ear to the marvelous accounts of spirits and hobgoblins, but somehow or other there was an attraction to what the Mexican related that caused him to question and cross-question until he had all that the fellow contained on this point.

The guide insisted that he himself had seen these sights and heard these sounds, which made such an impression upon him and others.

It was plain to see that he believed what he said, and the employer was somewhat puzzled to understand exactly how it was.

Vega was as positive as that he was a living man that he had stood on the very shores and on the very spot, where, at the close of day, they were looking out upon the placid surface of the lake, and standing thus and gazing, he had seen those strange, mysterious fig-

ures floating in the air, drifting hither and thither, until he held his breath, believing he stood on the boundary of the other world.

He had heard, too, the strains of music—ravishing strains, such as had never charmed his ear in other places.

Vega, in the course of his narrative, intimated that there were many who believed that this island contained the entrance to Paradise.

The sights and sounds to which he referred were such as would be expected by those who came that close to the gates of the Blessed Regions.

There was a consistency in this superstition which pleased Alfredo, and caused him to question the guide more closely than he would have done otherwise.

But the fellow was shocked by the proposition of his employer:

"Let's get a boat and go out to the island?"

Vega looked at him as if he doubted whether he heard him aright.

"Sure am I that you would not do such an awful thing."

"What is there so awful about that? No man can be blamed for wanting to get as near the gates of Paradise as he can, and as all the spirits are good, they will not hurt us for seeking to gratify such a natural curiosity. Come, Vega, go along and I will pay you well."

But the guide shook his head in a melancholy way, as if he felt sorry for such a rash and innocent man.

"There is not enough wealth in all Mexico to tempt me, and I hope that my master, if he has any such purpose, will think again, and take counsel of his conscience."

"I have no doubt that you believe all you say, Vega, but I don't think there is any danger at all. If you don't want to go to the Haunted Island, it is useless for me to insist on it, but if I get the chance I intend to look down upon, or rather up at it, as I see it stands a respectable distance above the water. I think, too, that Jack, here, will be glad to go with me; won't you, Jack?"

"I'm sure he won't," said Vega, hurriedly, looking longingly at the little fellow, as if he expected him to step into the breach and save his uncle from rushing to destruction.

"I wouldn't want to try it alone," said the boy, "but if uncle does, I'll have to go along to take care of him."

The gentleman referred to in this manner laughed, and Vega's countenance assumed an expression of grave sorrow.

But he said nothing.

He felt that he was among persons who were unable to appreciate the real situation, and that it was useless

to throw away his breath in the way of further expostulation.

So he folded his arms again and gazed off toward the Haunted Island, like one who was sunk in meditation, from which he regretted that he had been aroused by the importunity of unbelievers.

Alfredo Alfiero nodded his head toward the boy and walked a short distance to a large rock, where they sat down close together, to talk over several matters, where there was no danger of the guide overhearing what was said.

"When I told Vega that I had never heard of the Haunted Island before, I unconsciously stated an untruth, for I remember that I have heard it spoken of in Vera Cruz; there is a mystery about it which I mean to fathom to the bottom; but I want you to be careful and say nothing to the guide on the subject; for some reason he does not wish to talk about it, and so we will let it drop."

"But were you in earnest when you told him you was going to visit it if you could get the chance?"

"Most certainly I was; those yarns which he tells about ghosts and hobgoblins are not worth listening to. I shall look for some means of getting to the island to-night."

"How far out is it?"

"This part of the mainland is about as near to it as

any other point, and we are fully a half mile, if not more."

"Can't we swim out to it?"

"It is not impossible, but that is not the way in which I mean to reach it——"

Alfredo stopped talking at this instant, as Vega had turned about and was walking toward them.

"Do you mean to visit the island?" he asked, in a direct but respectful tone of his employer.

"I see no reason why I should not; I never yet felt any fears of haunted places, and I would like to take a look around there."

"If you go," said Vega, in a low, meaning voice, "you *will never come back again!*"

Alfredo was not scared a bit at this threat.

"I am always prepared to take the risk of any step of mine; if there is any danger there more than there is here, I will prepare for it; that's all there is about that, Vega."

The guide seemed on the point of replying, but he changed his mind and turned away without a word.

He walked slowly along, as if in deep thought, and never stopped his progress until he disappeared in the woods.

"Where has he gone?" asked Jack.

"I do not know; I do not think it is to hunt game, for we have enough meat for supper. He has some

other errand, and I half suspect we won't see him back here to-night."

"What shall we do?" asked Jack, who seemed to think that the guide, now that they were so far in the country, could not be dispensed with.

"If he doesn't come back again we will go without him."

Uncle and nephew sat on the rock for another half hour, but nothing was seen of Vega, and Frede became well convinced that he was offended at the persistency of his master in trying to visit the Haunted Island against his protestations, and as a consequence had gone off in a huff.

If such were the fact, he would probably stay away for a few days, and then show himself again.

So his disappearance caused them little concern.

The sun was now low in the sky, having dropped out of sight behind the mountains on the left, and the scene upon which they looked was one of the most beautiful that pencil of nature ever drew.

There were mountains on the west and north.

The latter were so far removed that they looked dim, faint, misty, and wore a bluish tint, which threw a veil over the rough, craggy outlines that revealed themselves on a closer approach.

Those on the left were nearer at hand, and were not wanting in a wild sublimity which is inseparable from all mountain ranges.

Amid all this grand exhibition of the mighty handiwork of nature the bright lake rested like some gem on the breast of a scarred warrior of herculean mold.

Not a breath of air was stirring. The surface of the lake was like that of a highly polished mirror, in which trees and rocks along the shore were reflected with absolute perfection.

Off in the distance was the little island, with its high, wall-like banks, rocks, and emerald vegetation, upon which not the slightest sign of life could be discerned with the aid even of a strong telescope.

Alfredo had some hope of detecting some person on the place when he came to examine it thus critically, but he was disappointed.

Man and boy indeed looked as if they had reached the confines of a country never before visited by man.

It required little effort of the imagination to make themselves believe that they were the first human beings who had ever trodden these lonely shores.

The twilight was deepening, and the dull gloom of night slowly crept over the lake and Haunted Island.

Gazing out across the water, it would have taken the most practical kind of a man to fight off a certain feeling of the weird mystery which hung over the scene.

They had been told that the place was haunted, and told, too, by one who asserted that he had seen with

his eyes and heard with his ears such sights and sounds as no creatures of this world can produce.

"Surely if there were such things as disembodied spirits," thought Alfredo, "this would be their chosen resort."

Man and lad stood silent and thoughtful until the night was fairly settled over lake, island and shore, and then Jack broke in upon the romantic associations with the very practical remark:

"Uncle Frede, I'd like to have something to eat."

"And so would I, and being unanimous on that point, and possessing, as we do, the same something to eat, what is to hinder? I do not see anything, and while you gather the sticks, I will trot out the rest of that meat which Vega brought in at noon, and which we will warm up for supper."

The programme was carried out to the letter.

Jack was surprised, however, when he started to build the fire in a hollow, where it was less liable to observation, and his uncle requested him to kindle it on the bank of the lake, where it could be seen further than from any other point.

Jack asked the reason for such a curious demand, but he did not receive a very satisfactory explanation.

There was plenty of wood here, and in a very short time they had a good blaze flaring up on the bank of the lake, and throwing the rays far out toward the Haunted Island.

Then the meat was more thoroughly cooked, and the two sat down to their evening meal.

The night wore on, but Vega was neither seen nor heard, and they almost ceased to talk of him.

The day had been warm, as will be remembered, but the night was as cool and pleasant as could be desired.

As it grew later, there came a slight breath of wind which swept gently across the lake, with a coolness which was as grateful as invigorating.

Alfredo remarked that they could not have selected a more delightful place in which to spend the night, and they would probably stay several days there.

This was an intimation that he would encamp in or near this spot until he had penetrated the mystery of the Haunted Island, or had found himself compelled to give up the attempt.

It made small difference to Jack, who had learned to rely upon his uncle so fully that he had no desire to wander off on any more expeditions of his own after the disastrous experience which he had encountered.

Early in the evening, there were a few faint mutterings of thunder, but they were so far away, and ceased so soon that all fears of a storm passed with them.

Jack was tired from the tramping of the day, and he did not wait long when he lay down, and, in accordance with his custom, went almost immediately to sleep.

Alfredo stretched out in an easy attitude by the smol-

dering fire, smoking languidly at his pipe, to which he had resorted after the failure of his cigarettes.

He looked very much like a man who was doomed soon to fall asleep, but such was not the fact.

His mind was full of strange thoughts to-night, and he acted very much as if he was laying some scheme or plan that was of great importance to somebody.

He frequently muttered to himself and looked off over the lake, after the manner of one who was expecting the appearance of some person, or was waiting the occurrence of some anticipated event.

CHAPTER XXIII

WONDERFUL MUSIC IN THE AIR

Alfredo Alfiero possessed no means of determining the hour of the night, but, to his judgment, it was fully half spent when he stretched himself out by the camp-fire, to go to sleep.

"It's about all that is left to me to do," he muttered, with a dissatisfied air; "I made a blunder, though I hope it will turn out to be for the best. However, there isn't a show for doing anything to-night, that's certain, and we will adjourn till to-morrow."

The dying camp-fire afforded no light.

A faint moon in the sky showed the lake for a short distance from shore, and here and there, when some fish agitated the surface, the ripples shimmered in the moonlight, as if fanned by the wing of some spirit flitting over it.

Alfredo had his theory of the Haunted Island, but he was disappointed that nothing took place.

He was passing into absolute unconsciousness, when he became sensible of something dancing through his mind which was not a creation of fancy.

He was sure he heard the sound of music.

He rose up on his elbow, and, to his amazement, the music sounded as if in the air, hundreds of feet over his head.

It was not stationary, but seemed to sink and rise in waves so faint at times that it was almost inaudible, and then it was as distinct as if the cause was just above him.

Alfredo was on the point of rising to his feet more than once, but he was fearful of breaking the spell and robbing himself of the most ravishing music to which he had ever listened.

At last the arm grew weary supporting his head, and he assumed the sitting position.

And then for the first time he learned the direction whence came the ravishing, heavenly music.

It was from the Haunted Island.

While Alfredo, rapt and wondering, sat listening and straining his powers of hearing, the ravishing strains suddenly ceased.

He held his breath, hoping they would recommence, but they did not, and he finally drew a heavy sigh of sadness.

"Shall I ever hear the like again?" he asked himself, thinking possibly that it might come once more.

But the hope died out, when the minutes came and passed, and all remained as profoundly silent as before.

While gazing off toward the island, he suddenly uttered a cry of surprise, and sprang to his feet.

A light, or rather a number of lights, that at first bore the appearance of stars, rose out of the lake.

But he knew they were upon the island, and a second glance showed that they were moving slowly in a circular direction.

They seemed, in fact, to be carried by persons who were signaling.

At once he looked along the lake shore for anything like a response to them.

None could be seen.

What could these curious sights mean?

As nearly as Alfredo could judge, there were about a dozen of them, though they shifted their position so often, and moved in and out among each other in such a manner that he was not sure he was right.

The exhibition continued, perhaps, a half hour, when it ended abruptly.

Silence and darkness at last reigned again.

The night was far spent, but still Alfredo felt no desire to sleep.

"Where is Vega?" he suddenly asked himself, raising his head and looking around him.

"If he was here, it would help matters somewhat, though I am sure he will tell anyone else before he will tell me all that he knows about this."

As the night advanced, and nothing more was seen or heard, he gradually fell into a slumber which lasted till the sun rose, when he was awakened by Jack, who wanted to know whether he meant to sleep all day.

The uncle then sprang up, and they began their preparations for the morning meal.

Alfredo did not think it best to tell so young a boy the strange things he had seen and heard during the night.

As they were without any food, it was necessary to shoot some game, or to try the water.

"I think a fish from the haunted lake would taste well," said Jack, when they were discussing the question.

Alfredo proceeded to act upon it at once.

He took it for granted that all such bodies of water were disturbed so unfrequently that they abounded with numerous kinds of fish.

In this supposition they were not disappointed. The line was no more than cast into the water when it was drawn out with a fish big enough to furnish both with a substantial breakfast.

This, and a species of wild apple, made them an enjoyable meal.

When the eating was done, they took a good long draught from the lake, whose water was as cool and pure as if it were the product of an innumerable number of mountain springs.

Alfredo was not a little astounded when Jack asked whether he had noticed any music during the night, adding:

"I either heard or dreamed I heard something like the harps of heaven, that mother used to tell me about."

"Folks have strange dreams sometimes," was the evasive answer of his uncle, who tried to lead him off the subject.

"What are we going to do to-day?" next asked the boy. "Are we to go ahead without Vega?"

"If he does not appear when we are ready to start, we will do so, but we ain't ready just yet."

"We have traveled over half the distance to Vera Cruz, have we not?"

"Yes, more than half, and we have the consolation that, if our guide fails to show himself, we can get along without him. That which lies before us is much less difficult and dangerous than that which we have left behind."

"Then let's start ahead—that is, as soon as you are ready?"

"That's what I mean to do, but you haven't forgot that island out there which Vega insists is haunted?"

"No; I will never forget about it, nor how you laughed at him when he said he heard wonderful music and lots of other things. What a big dunce he must be!"

Somehow or other, Alfredo didn't feel so much like laughing at the assertion as he did at the time it was made.

"I have decided to stay here, Jack, for this day, and possibly longer," said Alfredo; "and the reason why, is because I mean to learn something more about that Haunted Island out there. I want you to help me. Will you do it?"

"Yes, if there ain't any ghosts and hobblegoblins," replied the lad, with a desperate effort to screw up his courage to the sticking-point. "What part do you want me to act?"

CHAPTER XXIV

RECONNOITERING THE HAUNTED ISLAND

THE work expected of Jack Winch was so simple that he gladly accepted it when his uncle made the proposition.

It was merely that they should reconnoitre the Haunted Island from a safe distance.

The extent of the lake was rather too great to make the circuit of it in one day, and it was not proposed to do it.

But it was agreed that the man and boy should separate, taking opposite directions, and travel until they were able to make a pretty full survey of the interesting spot.

If Jack should go a considerable distance to the right, and his uncle about as far to the left, they would be able to see all there was any necessity of surveying.

After what had taken place the previous night, Alfredo was prepared to make some important discovery.

Each carried his loaded rifle, and it was not to be supposed that they would encounter any serious danger.

Alfredo impressed upon his nephew the fact that he

must be as watchful as he knew how, and in case he made any kind of discovery, he was to fire his gun, or give a shrill whistle, a well-known signal between them.

The sun was only fairly above the mountain peaks when they set out on the work of exploring.

Alfredo was compelled to climb over the rocks, and in many cases to make long detours around.

This not only lengthened his journey but increased the difficulty beyond all estimation.

From time to time he came to a halt, and, with his field-glass, scrutinized every portion of the island.

For a long time, nothing rewarded this painstaking work. He made one discovery, which afterward proved of great importance.

The centre portion of the island was a mass of rocks.

Through the trees and undergrowth, he could see great masses of gray and blackened stone, such as would have been left by the eruption of a volcano on this island.

"That's a capital hiding-place," said he, as he lowered his glass. "A man might crouch in there and make up his mind that he was out of the world, where he would never be seen or heard of again. I'm firmly persuaded that there are human beings there, or at least there were last night. Where they are to-day is more than I can guess."

He kept himself as much concealed, while making

these surveys, as he could, and had instructed Jack to do the same.

Suddenly he heard the whistle signal agreed on between him and Jack.

"Hello!" he said to himself; "Jack has found out something, sure, and I'm glad of it, for it is more than I have done. Hello! there he goes again."

This second exclamation was caused by hearing the lad repeat the signal, and before his uncle could send in a reply, it sounded a third time, showing that Jack estimated the value of his discovery pretty highly.

There is no telling how many times more the signal would have been repeated by the ambitious boy had not Alfredo at this moment put in a reply by way of protest.

This, of course, convinced Jack that there was no further necessity, just then, for any effort of the kind, and silence reigned.

Alfredo was all of half an hour in arriving at the place where the impatient Jack was awaiting him.

The boy was found crouching behind a rock.

"Well, my lad, what have you seen?"

"There, don't you see it?"

As he replied, he pointed to an object upon the bank, which, when looked at, was seen to be an Indian canoe.

It was of small size, and drawn up in such a way that a person would have been apt to pass directly by it without discovering it.

Jack had seen it entirely by chance.

Alfredo examined it as minutely as he could, but detected nothing new or startling in its appearance.

It was capable of holding three or four persons, and was constructed with considerable skill.

There were two long paddles lying on the ground beside it.

"Is that *all* you have seen?" asked the uncle, when he had inspected the boat.

"Of course it is, and I should think it was enough; it is more than *you* have found."

"You are right there, which can be the fact without amounting to much, inasmuch as I have not found anything at all."

"But you said yesterday, and last night, that you wanted to visit the Haunted Island, and now I have found you the means to do it. I think that is a good deal."

"Haven't you seen anything else?"

"No, not that I know of."

"Haven't noticed any person in this neighborhood? And haven't seen any one prowling about the island?"

"No; I have watched all I could, and was about to give up and go back and tell you it was no use, when I came plump on to this boat, and I thought I had found something big; so I whistled two or three times, afraid you might get so far you wouldn't be able to hear me."

"I heard you the first time;" and the man looked more serious, as he added, "this may prove of great use to us, after all. I mean to visit the island, and I can't need anything better than this boat to do it with."

"Then let's get in right away and pull for the island."

And the enthusiastic lad moved toward the vessel.

But his uncle restrained him.

"It isn't time yet; don't want any one on the island to see us when we try it; they might object to our going there, and so we will wait till night."

Jack could not see the wisdom of this.

"They may find us out in going there at night as well as at day."

"True, but the chances are in favor of our escaping at night."

This much agreed upon, the man decided to resort to a little strategy to deceive the fellows who were on the island, as he was convinced that they knew they were exciting to a great degree the curiosity of a couple of individuals on the mainland.

His plan was now to give out, as far as it could be done, the impression that he and Jack had thrown up all intention of approaching the island.

He had given Vega the belief that he was going to visit the Haunted Ground, if such a thing were possible, and now, it was in order to assume that it was impossible and to back out.

No great skill was needed to do this, and he set about it at once.

The first point was to show themselves, without appearing to do so.

They, therefore, came out from the hiding, as it may be called, in which they had indulged while making the reconnoissance.

"I told you to keep yourself hidden as much as you could," said Alfredo to his nephew, "and now I want you to do the other thing—that is, to make sure that no one on the island, if he has a pair of eyes, fails to see you."

"The best way to do that is to get up on the top of that rock, and dance and yell."

This was not deemed the part of prudence, as it would show that there was an attempt to attract attention to themselves.

This fact of itself might defeat the purpose which the man had in view.

But they started to return to the spot where they had encamped the night before, and in doing so, they rendered themselves so conspicuous that Alfredo felt no doubt that they were noticed by all who were on the island.

When they reached the scene of their encampment, a surprise awaited them, and one that caused no little speculation.

There were unmistakable signs that the camp had been visited during their absence.

There were footprints on the ground, distinctly marked.

They were not tracks made by a moccasin such as many Mexicans and Indians in Mexico wear, but the trail was evidently made by some heavy personage.

"Who do you think it was?" asked Jack.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"I know who it was."

The man looked at the boy in amazement.

The latter added with a laugh:

"Why, those are the tracks of Vega."

So they were, indeed. How strange that it had not occurred to Alfredo before, when he had seen the trail of the guide a hundred times, at least, and was fully acquainted with its peculiarities!

"Well, that was a stupid piece of blundering on my part," he laughed, pausing and looking at the prints on the ground.

"Vega has been here while we were away, and he has gone again. It begins to look as if we shall not see him at all."

"There he is, now!"

As the boy uttered this exclamation the very man of whom they were talking came to view, and approached with a smiling countenance.

After they had saluted each other, the guide remarked, in an inquiring voice:

"Have you visited the Haunted Island?"

"How can I visit it without a boat?"

"If you had a boat, would you go out to it?"

There was a peculiar manner in which this question was asked, which deepened a suspicion of Alfredo.

"I spent last night along the shore. What I then learned was wonderful; I will say nothing more on that point, but don't ask me to go out to the island after what I have told you."

This accomplished what was intended. Alfredo looked furtively at his guide while making this answer, and he saw his swarthy face lit up with an expression of delight.

It was what the man was expecting from his servant, and it confirmed a suspicion formed long before this.

"I know you did wise," said Vega. "I would not visit that island for all the wealth in Mexico, for if I did, I would never be able to go back to my beloved family, who would grieve for me till they died of broken hearts. It would be the same with you; therefore I say that señor has done a wise thing."

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE HAUNTED ISLAND

It was now indispensable that Vega, the guide, should be persuaded to part company with the other two for a while.

Unless this could be done, the little scheme that was on foot must be thwarted.

How to rid themselves of him without exciting his suspicion was the question which puzzled Alfredo.

In fact, however, Vega, the guide, was in the same trouble.

He wanted to get away from his employer for several hours, and he did not know how to manage it.

It was reserved for the guide to solve the difficulty.

"There is good game over yonder," said he, "and the day will be warm. I would like to hunt awhile on the other side of the lake."

"Well," said Alfredo, "the day promises to be warm, and I have little disposition to do much traveling when we have such a lot of climbing to do. So go off on your hunt, and where shall we meet again?"

The guide pointed to a large rock a half mile away, which was rendered conspicuous by its peculiar white color.

"Let us make it there to-morrow morning."

"Agreed; try and be there by daylight, for unless the weather becomes still hotter, we must start."

Vega departed almost immediately, in the best of humor.

With the departure of Vega, Alfredo told Jack to make ready for their start.

"Where were you going?" asked the boy.

"Just as straight for that rock that we agreed on as we can."

"All right," responded Jack, starting off with enthusiasm.

They toiled along the rocky shore, all the time making themselves as conspicuous as possible to those upon the island, if they chose to cast their eyes in that direction.

When at last they reached the spot, they were glad enough to throw themselves on the ground and take a rest before discussing any further plans.

During the day, nothing was seen or heard to add anything to their previous information.

A short distance away, Alfredo caught sight of Vega, cautiously climbing to the top of a high rock, from which he looked off in the direction where he supposed his friends to be.

When he turned away, his employer had little doubt that the fellow had been thoroughly deceived.

At last night descended once more on lake and wilderness.

"Jack, my boy," said his uncle, as he took his hand, "I am going off in an attempt to reach the Haunted Island, and I leave you here. I do not believe I run any risk—at any rate, not enough to take into account. So you must not be alarmed if I am not back right away, for I want to take a look around there while I have the chance."

"When do you think you will be back, uncle?"

"By morning at the latest, though I may possibly be detained beyond that time."

"And what shall I do while you are gone?"

"Rest, and prepare for what is to come. There is little that you have to fear, for you have had enough experience with wild animals and all sorts of reptiles to make you competent to take pretty good care of yourself. There are no wild beasts that you need dread. Here is a cavity in the rocks into which you can crawl, if necessary, where you will be safe from anything big enough to do you the slightest harm."

"'Spose it's a ghost, how then?"

"There won't be any ghost, and so don't allow yourself to think of that which doesn't exist."

After a few more words, the uncle shook hands again with the boy and took his departure.

"He's forgot one thing," chuckled Jack, when he

was left alone; "he forgot to tell me not to follow him. Now, if he had forbidden me to do that I would not have disobeyed him; but I am sure he did not, so he can't find fault if I start off to find out what all this means. He won't tell me anything, but he says there ain't any ghosts or hobblegoblins, and if any one knows he does. So, if there ain't such creatures on the island, why can't I go there as well as he?"

Alfredo left the boy behind, because he believed he could work out his plans much better alone.

Jack had no thought of starting off immediately after his uncle, for, in the first place, he had no means of doing so.

His idea was, that if the gentleman did not return at the time agreed upon, and he could find a way of reaching the island, he would do so, on the pretext that he was alarmed over his absence, and had gone to help him out of his trouble—that is, if he had gotten into any.

"Anyway, I don't want to get out there in the night time," he said to himself, "for if there is anything spookey, that's the time they would be sure to be around. If I visit it, I will do so when the sun is shining."

It was fully dark before Alfredo left his young friend, so that when he reached the canoe there was scarcely any light at all.

The moon did not rise till quite late, and he was sure, therefore, of having all the darkness he could want.

The little boat with the long ashen paddle was just as he had left it.

When he took his seat in the small craft, and lifted the paddle, he did it with the style and manner of a veteran.

The darkness failed to reveal anything, and the stillness was like that of a vault.

There seemed to be no reason why he should delay his departure, and he dipped the paddle for the first time in the waters of the lake.

He saw that the structure to which he had intrusted himself was not only graceful in build, but was splendidly balanced on the water, and controlled with marvelous ease.

There was no occasion for hurry, and he dipped his oar like one who was approaching with the greatest caution some dangerous point, where in all probability a deadly enemy was awaiting his coming.

When about half way between the land and the Haunted Island, Alfredo paused again and listened.

He was a little startled while in this attitude of attention, to catch just the faintest sound of another paddle in the water.

As nearly as he could judge, the sound came from the point at which he had embarked.

He waited long but heard no more.

Turning about, he moved stealthily back on the lookout for the other boat, but he failed to discover anything.

"It must have been some one going to the mainland," he concluded. "He will reach, perhaps, the very spot where this canoe was moored, and not finding it there, will know that something is up, though possibly he may think it was one of his confederates who has taken possession."

At any rate, Alfredo could not see as he was to gain anything by staying longer on the lake, and he resumed his approach to the Haunted Island and its mystery.

A few minutes later, he caught the dim outlines of the Haunted Island, looming up to view through the gloom, and he paused with a strange sensation.

It was needed now above any other time to proceed with perfect noiselessness, if he wished to effect a landing without detection.

Nothing was to be seen or heard to cause any misgiving, and he gently dipped his paddle, and the canoe at last touched the bank.

But the rocks were so high at this point, that he could not effect a landing, and he stole along the shore in quest of some better wharf.

In a few minutes he found one, and forcing the bow of the boat against the shore, he stepped out and drew the canoe after him.

At last Alfredo Alfiero stood on the Haunted Island.

CHAPTER XXVI

A STRANGE EXPLORATION

CONCEALING his canoe as best he could, he was about to leave, when he was startled by hearing the sound of a whistle behind him, and so near that he turned his head, expecting to see the cause of it.

The whistle, like that uttered by Jack Winch, was repeated several times in an impatient way, that showed the author was angry that the response did not come.

Finding he was not observed, Alfredo crouched down among the undergrowth and rocks, and waited.

When the signal was given several times, it ceased, and he heard the sound of some one coming up the rocks behind him.

Luckily for the man, he had secured a good hiding-place, where he could feel safe against discovery, unless the stranger approaching should come directly upon him.

A few seconds had passed, and the fellow was not yet in sight when he heard him speak—a fact which showed that, instead of one, there were two, and possibly more, persons.

The voices were such that he could not make out the words, which were few in number.

Immediately on the heels of this he heard again, more distinctly, their footsteps as they made their way up the rocks.

In a very short time they came to view, and, singularly enough, took their seats on a broad, flat rock within six feet of where Alfredo was crouching into the smallest possible space.

Here they sat awhile like men who were tired.

There were but the two, who were dressed in rough, shaggy suits, despite the mildness of the night, and, so far as could be determined in the gloom, they were a couple of ugly-looking customers, whom one would not care to meet on a lonely road at night.

By-and-by one of them spoke in the same low, gruff tone that had struck the ear of the listener a short time before.

"I wonder where the deuce Pedro has gone? He was only a few strokes ahead of us, and must have heard me whistle to him."

This single remark told the interesting fact that the couple had seen the canoe which Alfredo took so much pains to hide, and they had concluded that it was impelled to the spot by one of their own number, who for some cause unknown to them, had refused to respond to their call to him.

This was rather gratifying, so far as the present was concerned, though there was no telling to what complications it might lead.

"Pedro sometimes gets huffy," the man continued, "and won't take notice of anything at all. What do you s'pose he was doing ashore?"

Here was a direct question, and there was no escaping a reply, which was as brief as it could be made.

"I don't know."

"I guess he was looking to see whether that man and his cub had gone away, though Vega told us that he went off hours ago, and would not be seen again in these parts."

Then came some more silence, the companion making no response to the half inquiring remark of the other.

"It looked a while, so Vega says, as if the person was determined to get here sure, but he seems to have been scared at something, and is now more anxious to leave than he is to stay."

This observation was entitled to some comment, and the other fellow seemed to conclude that he might as well go ahead and say all there was to be said about matters and things in general.

"It's a lucky thing for him that he changed his mind, for if he got on the island, he would have never got off again."

The speaker waited till his comrade had fully digested this, when he added:

"I don't see as there's any use of our staying here; do you?"

"No."

Thereupon the two rose to their feet simultaneously, and moved off.

In doing so, they passed so near to the crouching eavesdropper that the latter was sure he must be discovered.

He could have reached out and touched them with either hand.

The instant they were by, Alfredo rose noiselessly to his feet, and without stirring from where he stood, gazed after them.

His intention was to learn the direction they took, and then to dog their footsteps, in the hope of learning a part of the errand which had brought him to this place.

There was just enough light for him to discern the head and shoulders of the two as they walked off with heavy steps.

He waited until they were a few feet further away, when he started after them.

But a disappointment followed.

At the very moment he was sure of being on their track, they vanished from view, disappearing as suddenly as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up.

He paused a minute or two, confident that he would see, or at least hear, something more of them.

But their voices, or, rather, the voice of the one, was heard no more, and Alfredo could not escape the conclusion that they would not show themselves again that night.

"That is a strange proceeding," he muttered, as he stood puzzling and asking himself whether there was anything he could do to unravel the mystery.

"I saw them a few minutes ago, right there, and they cannot be very far off. The only way in which they could give me the slip in that manner was by going down."

To attempt to learn how this was done was certainly a rash and dangerous proceeding, unless he had the sunlight to help him.

After debating the question for a time with himself, he ventured to creep forward a short distance, when he paused to learn whether there was anything immediately in his front which would help explain what had become of the two men that had disappeared from before his very eyes.

There were rocks and irregular masses of stone all around him, just such as he had encountered ever since placing foot on the island.

Lying flat on his face, he reached forward his hands and groped around in the gloom, half expecting to find the opening which had taken the fellows from his gaze.

He thought more than once that he had placed his hand on something which would tell the story.

There were pieces of stone which yielded to the slightest pressure he exerted, and he fancied these were used as a sort of covering to the opening.

But it was hard to understand, if such were the case, how the men managed to vanish not only with such suddenness, but without the least noise, so far as he could judge.

Finally, after quite an extended search, he was compelled to give it up, and conclude that the " door " was further on.

" If such is the fact," he thought, " it cannot be any great ways, for they did not go much beyond this point."

He was still lying on his face, feeling every inch of the way, for he was determined that he would not be led into any trap from which he could not effect an instant retreat, if it should become necessary to do so. He was struck with the looseness and shell-like character of the stones over which he was making his way.

Despite the caution he used, he could not avoid making considerable noise, which he knew could be heard some way off, if it so happened that anyone was listening.

In this careful, but uncertain manner, Alfredo gradually advanced along the rocks, until he began to suspect he had gone as far as were the two men at the time they disappeared so suddenly from sight.

This belief tended to make him as careful in his movements as one could be and still really move, but the fact that he should discover nothing where no attempt had been made to conceal anything from him was exasperating.

Alfredo made a sort of horizontal compass of himself, spreading out and taking in all the surface he could, while he made the hunt so minute that it would have revealed the smallest object.

He even turned to the right and afterwards to the left, under the suspicion that he was passing to one side of the opening which had received the men from his sight.

This sort of craw-fishing was continued until he became certain that he had gone beyond the place for which he was searching.

He had now passed so far that he touched the limit of the small plateau along which he had been making his careful hunt, and he found himself confronted by rugged rock again.

It being elevated several feet above his head, as well, he was forced to rise to his feet.

This was done with great care, for no man could have been more firmly convinced than was he that he stood on the most dangerous sort of ground.

At the very moment of coming to his feet in this manner, something like a shadow flitted before his

face, so quickly that he could not make sure what the real cause was.

It seemed as if an object had been thrown in front of him, or a large bird had whisked so fast that he could not see it come or go.

He stood still again, of course, to listen and use his eyes.

A strange fear took possession of him that it was none of these, but a man who was in the very act of disappearing at the instant he rose to his feet.

But for his strong common sense he would have felt a superstitious awe.

The way, as he advanced, now became rougher and more difficult of travel than it had been, and more than once he doubted whether it was not the wiser part to turn about and try some other direction.

As nearly as he could judge he was very near the centre of the island, where he was right among the rocks, and surrounded with trees and undergrowth.

He was creeping along in this manner, when, with the suddenness of the lightning stroke, the catastrophe came.

CHAPTER XXVII

SUBTERRANEAN EXPLORATIONS

All at once the loose stones over which he was making his way began rattling and moving so rapidly beneath him, that he stopped abruptly, hoping they would do the same before the whole island was aroused.

The noise, on the contrary, increased, and he made the alarming discovery that the ground was disappearing from beneath his feet.

In such an event, all he could do was to retreat in time.

He made the attempt, his first effort being so hurried and desperate that his feet slipped, and he fell.

The fall was fatal to anything like getting away.

While on his hands and knees, and before he could rise, he felt that he was going backwards and downwards, beyond all possibility of recovery.

All he could do was to utter a prayer and hope that he had not far to go, and that there was not much in the way of stones and rocks to come after him.

Alas! he was disappointed in both prayers.

The supplication had scarcely taken shape in the heart, when his firm support vanished from under him and he felt he was falling through the air.

No pen can describe the thrilling terror of that fall.

Those who have been so unfortunate as to travel involuntarily through space for any distance know how much greater it seems than it really is.

So it was with Alfredo in the present instance.

Down and down he went until the thought flashed through his brain that he had fallen into some excavation leading to the middle of the earth.

All around was dizzying blackness—the very blackness of darkness. There was a whirring, ringing sensation in his ears, strange lights flashed and flickered through his brain, he heard wonderful voices calling to him through the strangling night; he caught even their laughs and jibes over his calamity.

It seemed as if there were other persons besides him traveling downward into the abyss.

It was as if half a dozen had fallen into a bottomless pit, and were thus spinning downward to destruction.

The humming in his ears became more intense with every beat of the throbbing pulse, until it was a roar, sounding like the rush of a Niagara.

He had thrown out his hands, from the instant of starting, in the instinctive effort to catch something with which to stay his descent, but, failing as he did, he gave it over and shot downward like a meteor, straight to some unknown point, leagues away.

He would reach it by-and-by. The downward rush could not continue many more hours.

If he were speeding toward the centre of the earth, this velocity must take him there in a few minutes more.

Such were the wild thoughts that passed through his brain.

It seemed to him that he was minutes and hours in making the descent, just as the brain will dream over the events of years in a few seconds. And yet, in spite of all this, he did not fall so far, and he was not long in starting and stopping.

When Alfredo was sure he was within a few hundred feet of the bottom, he was closer than he imagined.

The check came, and the shock was terrible.

It seemed to him for an instant that he had been caught between two mountains that were rushing toward each other, and then instantly on the heels of that came blank unconsciousness.

The explorer had no means of determining how long he remained in this condition, but it is not likely that it was very long, as he was not seriously injured, being more shaken up than bruised, though he carried the memory of that fall a long time, in the shape of numerous sore spots on his person.

The first thing of which Alfredo was conscious was the sound of falling water.

All around was impenetrable darkness, and it was some time after he raised his head on his hand before he could recall what had taken place and how it was he was here.

The first thing was to ascertain to what extent he was injured.

He was severely bruised, and for a time he believed that one of his legs was broken.

Happily, however, he discovered that he was not incapacitated from moving about and using all his limbs.

He never went abroad without a plentiful supply of matches, carried in a little waterproof safe.

Drawing a wisp of paper from his pocket, he lit one corner, and holding the flame above his head, looked around with the most intense curiosity to learn into what sort of chamber he had fallen.

The flame gave him more knowledge than he expected, and at the same time much less than he desired.

The curious part of what he learned was that he could not see the opening, nor any sign of it, through which he must have come in making his rather hurried entrance into these regions.

The chamber was merely a cavern, and nothing else.

The floor was nearly level, while the sides were jagged and rough, like the walls of some cañon or ravine of the mountains.

They were separated by a width of a dozen to twenty yards, and the underground region, in short, had the appearance of a winding ravine, with all the irregularities which would have characterized it had it been beneath the surface of the earth.

Having taken a survey of the upper portion, or roof, of the subterranean dwelling, Alfredo hastened to gain what knowledge he could of that which was below before his torch should expire.

Behind, the walls seemed to close, so as to bar all passage in that direction, while the avenue continued on indefinitely in the opposite course.

While he could see plainly, he started along the cavern in the only route that was open to him.

When he made the move his torch was pretty well spent, and he could not hope to go far before it would expire. But as it was, he managed to run some fifty yards, when it dropped in flakes from his hand.

He was able to see that the way was all clear, however, for nearly as far ahead, to which point he advanced before stopping.

Going thus far, he paused again with very little more knowledge than when he entered the place.

He had seen water trickling down one side of the cavern, but the greater portion was dry.

The torch had shown him enough of the cavern to satisfy him that the traveling along the interior was not so perilous as he had suspected at first, and he made up his mind to continue it.

He had only to persevere and he would come out *somewhere*.

If he should reach the termination of the cavern, he

might be able to climb up the side, where the walls were so rugged that it did not look to be a very difficult feat.

Such were his speculations as he made his way forward, listening and looking for some clue.

Alfredo was determined that nothing should escape him, and when he heard something which sounded like the voices of persons, he paused and listened, anxious to find out whether he could locate the point whence it came; but they stopped altogether, and so he was disappointed.

His hopes were kept alive, however, by catching sight of something which resembled a misty cloud resting against the roof of the cavern.

At last he concluded that it must be that for which he had been seeking—an opening in the top of the cavern.

Now, if there was only some means of climbing to it, he would be well out of his trouble.

But was there any possible ladder to ascend.

That remained to be seen, but it was very doubtful whether he could make his way to it in the darkness.

But Alfredo was a brave man, not easily discouraged, and he prepared to try it.

His rifle was secured on his back, so that it would not interfere with the freedom of his movements, and he began the cautious attempt to make his way up to the opening leading to the surface of the island.

He was encouraged at the start by finding that this orifice was seemingly over the wall up which he started, instead of being placed between them.

In the latter case it would have been utterly out of his power to reach it.

Now it was among the possibilities, as it seemed to him.

The wall up which he started was so rough and jagged that he found no trouble at the start in grasping the projections and sustaining himself.

"If it continues like this, I won't have much trouble," he said, after making his way to a point which must have been fully one-half the distance between the floor and roof.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DESPERATE SCHEME

It is not often that such good fortune attends a man as attended the attempt of Alfredo Alfiero to extricate himself from the cavern on the Haunted Island.

Reaching upward in the gloom, his hand had but to grope around for a few seconds, when it came in contact with some flinty projection, strong enough to support his weight with entire safety.

This was the hardest kind of work, after his fall, but he was inspired by the hope of saving his life, and there can't well be any stronger motive than that.

When he was pretty near the top, he paused to calm his nerves and to make a little use of his eyes.

The good luck had excited him with the desire of ending the suspense without waiting the comparatively slow process of climbing.

He wanted to see whether there was a chance of his reaching the opening which promised to lead him to freedom.

He found a shelf of rock, broad enough to afford him comfortable rest while he produced his matches.

His hands trembled from the exertion, and he came near dropping them all to the bottom.

When he was calmer, he lit the match, and before the little twist of flame was fairly agoing, he raised it above his head. A slight puff of wind blew it out.

"Better luck next time," he said, with a laugh, for he had cause to be in good spirits.

He shaded the second match from a slight draft which appeared to be going up out of the cavern, and finally raised it above his head, while his eager eyes devoured all he could take in.

The opening upon which he had fixed his hopes was no more than a dozen feet at the most, beyond his reach, and, so far as he could judge, it was as easy to reach it as it was to come any part of the distance he had already passed over.

"Thank the Lord for His mercies!" he exclaimed, still holding the tiny flickering match above his head and peering upward. "This is a great deal better fortune than I had a right to expect, and if——"

To his unbounded consternation, the report of a rifle resounded through the cavern below him, and all doubt as to the target was removed by the chipping off of a piece of the rock by the bullet, which could scarcely have come any closer without hitting him.

This was alarming, indeed, and showed that there were enemies in the cavern below, who had learned of the invasion of their Haunted Island by an outsider and enemy.

Never did a person extinguish a flame more quickly than did Alfredo the flickering blaze in his hand.

He didn't propose to hold the candle to be shot by.

He concluded at once that the voices he had heard were those of persons in the cavern with him—they having learned of his presence from the torch and matches he had lighted, with no thought of any danger incurred in doing so.

This looked as if there was some other means of ingress and egress, of which he had yet to learn.

That, however, was less important than the necessity of getting out as soon as he could.

A stranger would have been at great disadvantage in a contest with one who was familiar with such a battle-ground as this, and Alfredo had no desire of staying there and entering into a dispute over it.

With renewed energy he began climbing toward the opening again, and in a few seconds was within reach of the margin, by which he hoped to swing himself into freedom and safety.

He was not very easy over the fear that when the villains below should find the opening pretty well filled by the body of the enemy at whom they had already fired, they would give him another volley.

The single shot showed such skill that he was afraid to make himself the target for any more.

Nevertheless, it had to be encountered, and time was that precious that he did not hesitate.

The instant he could reach the edge of the opening, he grasped it with a firm hold, and swung off over the darkness of the cavern below.

There was one dreadful moment, when he thought his hands were losing their hold, but he recovered quickly, and with a powerful effort drew his body upward, so that it rested on the surface of the ground.

This was the second when he believed he was particularly exposed to a shot from beneath, and he put forth every ounce of strength at his command.

There was no report of any gun, and he speedily placed himself out of all peril from any one in the cavern.

"Thank God!" he murmured again, realizing what a remarkable escape he had effected, and half convinced at the same time that it was his duty to leave the Haunted Island and let some fully equipped expedition take it in hand.

The sky had grown somewhat lighter during his absence, but there was a great deal of shadow from the trees, so that the light penetrated only here and there.

Having come out through a very different hole than that by which he entered, Alfredo found himself completely at a loss, for a time, to tell where he was.

So far as he could judge, he was quite near the shore, for he caught the gleam of water among the trees, and he made his way toward it.

"This isn't the place where I landed, I am sure," he said to himself, when he reached the margin and had a little time to look around.

No one would have supposed, in standing where he was, that there had been any one on the island for years, for the night and scene were as calm as if the spot had never been invaded by the foot of man.

Alfredo was able, after a time, to fix in his mind the spot where he landed, which was on the opposite side the island.

He made his way there, with all the caution he had learned was necessary in this place, and he struck the shore again without having encountered anything to excite his alarm.

As it happened, he found the very place where he had drawn up the canoe, but not the boat itself.

That had vanished.

"So my retreat is cut off," he said to himself. "It looks as if the only way in which I can reach shore is by swimming."

Before doing that, he thought it was best to try and hunt awhile, to see whether there was not some available boat within his reach.

The night was far advanced by this time, and it was one of the strangest things connected with this business, that where there was such evidence of many persons being on the island he should encounter so few.

While he was wondering over the fact, he was roused to greater caution by hearing evidence of some one embarking near at hand.

Just beyond a pile of rocks were several parties making ready to launch a boat, and Alfredo crept forward to the top of the mass and peered over.

The space here was open.

There were exactly a half dozen men, that seemed to have just come down to the shore, where they were talking a few minutes before leaving.

Now and then he could make out a word, but not enough to form any idea of the subject to which it referred.

None of the party had entered the boat, though one stood with both hands on the prow, as if awaiting the order to shove it into the water.

The other five were close together, talking in low tones, as if on purpose to prevent what they said being heard by eavesdroppers.

One fact struck Alfredo, who was so intent on learning all that he could that he observed many small things which he would have passed over at other times.

The man who was standing closer to him than any of the others bore some resemblance in height and dress to himself.

His coat, hat, and general "get up" Alfredo recognized as his own, and he thought it would be no dif-

ficult matter for one to pass for the other in the dark, as both spoke the same language.

The party were very much interested in something they were discussing, for they kept it up a long while, though, much to Alfredo's vexation, they avoided getting their voices up to the point of allowing him to become acquainted with what they meant.

The man who was leaning on the prow of the canoe became tired, and straightened up for awhile, and then took his seat on the land.

The discussion continued some minutes longer, when the man who had attracted the interest of Alfredo by his resemblance to himself abruptly turned about and walked away among the rocks, in the rear of the eavesdropper.

As he moved off the watcher heard him say something to the effect that he would be back again in a short time.

The rather strange combination of events suggested a rash project to Alfredo—one which, if he had taken time to consider, he would never have attempted.

It was to take the place of the man who resembled himself.

Everything, it will be seen, conspired to make the project a success.

Besides the similarity in person and dress to which we have referred, there was that in the departure of the man which invited such a mad scheme.

Alfredo waited till the man had been out of sight several minutes, for to rush down immediately would attract more attention than he cared about facing just then.

The rest of the company disposed themselves to await the return of the one of their number who had disappeared for a short time.

Suddenly what seemed to be the very man himself came over the rocks, making his way down over the same path by which he had left.

The instant Alfredo was seen, and when he was within a rod of the party, the thought came over him that he was doing the rashest thing of his life.

He hesitated a minute, and was on the point of turning about, when one of the men addressed him:

"What is the matter?"

Even then he might have made a trivial excuse for turning away, and could have reached a safe distance without their suspecting anything wrong until after he was out of sight.

But, what was a rare thing with him, he was confused, and he thought it would be fatal to retreat, thinking so until it was really too late to withdraw.

"Nothing is the matter," he answered, in the most indifferent manner, sauntering down to the water's edge.

"Are you ready to go?" asked the man near the prow, rising to his feet and awaiting his orders.

"Yes, get in and shove off."

There followed a general scrambling, and in a few minutes all were within the boat, which was large enough to carry double the number.

Alfredo was among the first to enter, and he took his seat near the stern, trying to cover up and hide his face as much as he could, for with every moment that passed the conviction became stronger that he was attempting a game too desperate to succeed.

It was plain as yet that they had not been excited by anything in his manner and appearance different from what was anticipated.

There was no telling how soon some inadvertence of Alfredo would expose it all.

Suppose the right man should come down to the edge of the lake and hail them for leaving him in this style, what an interesting complication would follow!

Suppose one of the five who were so close to him should press Alfredo with questions which he could not answer, how surely he would betray himself!

There was enough light, when they were placed thus close together, to see each other's faces quite distinctly, and what more probable than that the first one who addressed him directly should look him so squarely in the countenance that there could be no failure to see that he was another man altogether?

In the very probable event of such a betrayal, all

escape was cut off, from the fact that they were on the lake, where the single man had no means of hiding himself, and was deprived of the miserable consolation of using his bruised and aching legs with which to flee.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE FURNACE

Alfredo felt that he deserved the worst consequences of his rashness, which feeling, however, did not lessen his desire to get out of the difficulty, if there was any in which to do it.

He crouched down in the stern of the canoe, vailing his face as much as possible, and there was a chance that he might avoid too close scrutiny, so long as the suspicion of the men remained quiet.

It would seem that the tones of his voice ought to have attracted attention, but they had not, thus far.

The man was so apprehensive on this score, that he resolved to keep silence henceforth.

Considering himself a sort of leader of the party, no one would deny his right to be silent if he chose, and it is deemed more consistent, as a rule, that the director of an expedition should keep his own counsels rather than impart them to his subordinates.

While these thoughts were rushing through the brain of Alfredo, two of the men were using the paddles with an easy dexterity that kept the canoe moving steadily through the water in the direction of the mainland.

The silent man in the stern ached to order them to use their paddles with greater vigor, but he was afraid to do so, and he held his peace.

The men, as they advanced, kept up a desultory talk among themselves, and Alfredo listened to every syllable.

At first there was nothing said of any special interest, but it was not long before he found that it bore a direct reference to him.

These men all seemed to know that the island had been visited that night by a man whom they considered had no business there.

They rejoiced in the belief that he would not be able to return and tell of his exploits, though they did not know what had befallen him while attempting the exploration of the Haunted Island.

"They are all watching for him," said one, "and he cannot get away; the moment he approaches the shore, that moment will he be seized and compelled to die the death of all those who attempt to invade our place and home."

"They may find him before he reaches the shore," said one of those who were using the paddles.

"They are hunting over the island for him, and they may do so; the fellow was cunning enough to make Vega think he had given up all thought of visiting the island, and so threw that stupid Vega off his guard."

Alfredo was curious to learn by what means they had learned that he was upon the island.

The great fear of Alfredo was that the other fellow might appear on the shore behind them, and by a halloo make the whole plot known to them, and thus precipitate the destruction of himself.

He was in a torture of anxiety, and expected to hear his voice every minute, while, as he peered forward in the gloom, he could catch no sight of the shore, which seemed to recede as they advanced.

His suffering in this respect finally reached that point that he said, in a low voice:

"Row faster; you will not reach land till morning at this rate."

"And you said on shore that there was no need of going there till daylight," was the rather impertinent but crushing response of one of the oarsmen.

This was unexpected to Alfredo, who would not have made the remark had he anticipated any such reply as that.

But he was equal to the occasion.

"That was before we started; now we are on the way, and we may as well go faster than the snail."

This produced the desired effect.

The two men dipped their paddles deeper, and the canoe immediately increased its speed.

It certainly was a wonderful thing that, besides the

resemblance between the outer appearance of Alfredo and the man whom he had never before seen, there should also be such a similarity in their voices.

That there was such a resemblance was self-evident, else he would not have escaped detection so long.

However, there are no two voices that are exactly alike, though not unfrequently they are found with a remarkable resemblance to each other.

There are minor tones and shades of modulation that are always sure to betray the truth in the end, and it was, therefore, not only wise, but imperatively necessary, that Alfredo should keep as quiet as he could, without arousing suspicion by such silence.

For a few minutes succeeding this command, there was complete quiet in the canoe.

The men seemed to gain the idea that their leader was not in the best of humor, and they held their peace for a while.

The "leader" himself was a little suspicious that this silence boded ill, and signified that they had learned the truth.

But Alfredo was morbidly suspicious.

Such could not have been the case, as a watchful eye would have detected the evidences of the truth among the Mexicans, who were so greatly the superiors in strength of the single man sitting in the stern of the boat.

As often as he dared, Alfredo looked longingly forward through the gloom, in the prayerful hope that he might catch sight of the dark outlines of the shore.

He had become convinced, before this, that they were heading for a point very far removed from where he had embarked earlier in the evening.

He cared nothing for that; all he asked was that he might gain the chance to place his feet once more on the hard land, and he would lose little time in parting company with these characters.

As the minutes wore away, this hope increased, and he began to believe that if the man did not appear on the island behind them and call out, there was a possibility of his escaping, after all.

As he looked at it, all now depended on that.

Thus far Alfredo had escaped questioning, but he was not to be spared the rest of the way.

While he was peering forward in the gloom, hoping to catch a glimpse of the mainland, the one who sat nearest him suddenly turned his head and asked:

"Did you see Vega to-day?"

"Yes."

"Did you speak to him about that?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing special. It is all right."

The questioner acted as if he was not exactly sat-

isfied with this reply, but he did not press for a more explicit explanation.

Alfredo was alarmed at the occurrence, but he hoped to be spared anything more of the kind, until he would have a chance to give them the slip by way of answer.

But the hope had scarcely taken shape when another fellow in the furthest part of the canoe put in a question.

"What shall we do when we get on shore?"

Alfredo was getting desperate. He could not stand this. Unless it was checked pretty summarily an explosion was inevitable.

His lips had parted with the purpose of making a sharp reply, suggesting to the questioner that the best thing he could do was to do nothing, when the man came unexpectedly to his relief by adding a supplement to his inquiry.

"Will we go on or wait there?"

"Wait."

There! that matter was settled, and he prayed that he would be left in peace.

Again he leaned forward and peered through the gloom, but still the welcome sight failed to meet his eye. But he was sure the greater part of the distance had been passed, and they ought to touch mainland in a few minutes more.

Silence followed, during which nothing was heard

but the almost noiseless dip of the paddle and the responsive shooting forward of the canoe.

The hopes of Alfredo were at the highest point, when a shiver of horror passed over him, and he felt as if smitten on the head by a cannon-ball.

From across the lake came a sound of some one calling. He could not mistake its meaning.

There was but the single expression, which in Spanish is equivalent to the hail: "Halloo!"

Good heavens! was there no way in which he could escape the precipice before him?

As if to make the torture the greater, he caught sight of the shore in front.

A few more strokes, and the canoe would be carried there. But the two who held the paddles in their hand stopped the instant they heard the voice, and, like all the others, listened, not suspecting what it meant.

Had their suspicions been awakened, they would have detected the meaning of it all by the sound of the voice.

As it was, it puzzled them, but they saw nothing more. Something additional was needed to explain it.

Alfredo felt that that additional something would be given in a moment more, and it would never do to wait and listen in this style.

"Paddle!" he commanded, and the men resumed their work.

The shore came out plainer to view as it was approached. Again across the lake came the sound of that voice: "Halloo!"

Alfredo was in the fiery furnace.

With the land only a few yards away, he meant not to fail now. The voice on shore was not recognized.

But Alfredo expected each instant that he would add some inquiry as to why they did not respond, in which case they would be sure to see that it was their real leader who was hailing them.

Had they not already discovered that fact?

CHAPTER XXX

RUNNING FOR LIFE

"Row faster," said Alfredo, impatiently, for it seemed to him that the men with the paddles would never reach the land.

The two Mexicans continued swinging their paddles, but the occasion was one of those when seconds are hours, and hours become eternity.

But scarcely the length of the canoe intervened between it and the shore, when the man left on the island called out for the third time, his voice being pitched in so high and savage a key, that it resounded across the lake like the notes of a trumpet.

"Halloo! what do you mean? Why do you not answer my hail?"

Strange thoughts must have rushed to the brain of the five men in the boat upon hearing these words, and Alfredo was in that desperate mood that he could not reason calmly and decide what he ought to do.

The men ceased paddling, but the impulse which the canoe had already gained was enough to send it gently forward until the prow touched the shore.

Between Alfredo and the dry land was the boat with the five men in his path.

To leave the craft, it was necessary to go by all of these, for only just the forward part of the canoe touched.

The two immediately in front began talking in a low voice, and Alfredo caught enough to feel that their suspicions were excited.

The rest of the crew were unable to understand what it all meant.

The explorer saw that the only chance of getting away was by leaving at once.

He rose to his feet, his nerves seeming to be all steel, now that the crisis was upon him.

Without a word, he stepped between the men, all making room for him, and affected by the spell which remained with the half belief, or, at least, the doubt, as to his identity.

Alfredo knew better than to show any haste or excitement now, when every eye was upon him, and when all depended on his showing the coolness of a veteran.

He expected they would bar his progress, as he picked his way along with such care and tardiness.

He was resolved that, if they did, he would make a leap for land, and shoot down whoever interposed.

At last he placed his foot on the gunwale, and one bound carried him ashore.

At this moment the two who were consulting in the stern of the boat gained an idea of the facts, helped

thereto by some peculiarity of voice, appearance, or manner.

"Hold on there!" called out one of them, as they both rose to their feet; "we would speak to you, señor."

But señor concluded that he wouldn't speak just then. He was on land, and there he meant to stay, so long as he could.

Instead, therefore, of stopping, he walked the faster toward the wood, which, fortunately, was abundant in this place.

"Shoot him! Kill him! He is an impostor!'" called out the same man, springing ashore in pursuit.

But the fugitive had gained a good start, and he improved it to the utmost.

The summons of the Mexican told him that he was detected, and all that remained was to use his legs as well as he knew how. Which he proceeded to do.

The moon was rising as he made the plunge for freedom, but there was so much shadow that it made little difference, so far as concealing himself was concerned.

He was no more than fairly started, when he heard his enemies close behind him, and matters were made more lively by the cracking of revolvers.

The pursuers were not disposed to give the fugitive any advantage at all.

Alfredo did not care to ask any, though some of the bullets came a great deal closer than was comfortable.

The roughness of the path was decidedly in favor of Alfredo.

By leaping from one point to another and dodging here and there, he distracted their aim, if nothing more, while he was on the watch for some good place that would serve as a concealment.

He tore forward like a deer fleeing before the hunter's dogs, caring nothing whither he went, so that it took him away from his enemies.

The pursuers did not forget to pop away with their pistols, so that the fugitive had every possible motive to make the best time he could.

Every few minutes Alfredo looked over his shoulder at the men who were determined on taking his life.

He had gained, and unless something unexpected should intervene, he stood a good chance of getting away altogether.

He dared not wait much longer, but after darting around a rock, he made several bounds, and threw himself flat on his face behind another, where there was a species of matted undergrowth and vines particularly favorable to concealment.

So close was the pursuit, that he had barely time to get himself in position, when he heard the footsteps and saw the figures of the men coming in almost a direct line for the spot where he was hid.

His first impulse was to spring up and dart off again,

but that would have been fatal, for they were so near that they would have had no trouble in sending more than one bullet through him, even if they should fail to catch him.

So he lay still and took his chances.

So near did one of the Mexicans pass that he came within a hair's-breadth of stepping on Alfredo, who held his breath in suspense.

But he went by, followed immediately by the others, none of whom seemed to suspect that the fugitive had stopped running.

Alfredo remained motionless until they had vanished, when he sprang up, and in a crouching position ran some little distance at right angles to the course he had been following.

He was well aware that the Mexicans would speedily detect the ruse played upon them, and would be back to search for him.

Had he remained where he was, he would have run great risk of being found; hence his change of base, for he had not gone a hundred feet, when he heard signals which told that the pursuers were again close at hand.

But Alfredo gained much advantage from his course, and there was no need for his running into the peril from which he had escaped by such a narrow chance.

He was so far removed from where the men were searching, that he could keep on stealing along with-

out being seen or heard, and he took the occasion to increase the distance between himself and them.

As soon as he could feel anything like safety, he stole along in the direction of the lake, intending to reach the point where he had left the canoe.

After what had taken place, he felt like paying back the Mexicans for the persistency with which they had tried to take or shoot him.

His intention was to destroy or injure the canoe in such a way that it could not be used in returning to the island.

Almost at the same moment, he caught the outlines of a smaller canoe heading toward the same spot, and containing a single individual.

He knew at once who this person was.

It was his "double," who, growing tired at the indifference shown him by his men, had started out to learn the cause, and, perhaps, chastise the guilty ones.

Any one could have told he was mad from the way he swung the paddle, the boat skimming over the water like a swallow.

Alfredo carefully drew his revolver, with the intention of shooting him; but, as it seemed to him that such a proceeding was too much like murder, he kept back and watched the man.

The instant the boat touched shore the man sprang out and made off in pursuit of a party whose precise location he knew nothing about.

"If there was any way in which to make him more furious than he is, I would do it," said Alfredo, amused at the turn the business had taken, "for I would like him to tear around when he catches sight of them. I would wish that he could be so mad that he wouldn't stop to hear explanatons, but just bang right and left as soon as he gets the chance."

But the man was gone, and Alfredo was once more left to himself.

"I will leave my card, just to let them know I have been here," he said, as he drew his knife and proceeded to carve the larger canoe in such a style that it was quickly rendered useless, so far as the owners were concerned.

After this, he completed his work by cutting such a hole in the bottom that it began to fill with water, and when he shoved it from shore, it went almost immediately to the bottom, carrying considerable property, which was not likely to be heard of again.

Having left this evidence of his feelings, he went as deliberately to work to scuttle the smaller boat.

This required but a few minutes, and then he rested, content.

"I suppose they have other boats with which they can visit the island when they wish to do so, but there is a good deal of satisfaction in giving vent to a fellow's feelings in such an expressive style as that."

Alfredo had made up his mind that, as he was well clear of the haunted place, he would stay so.

The visit made there had showed him the utter folly of arraying himself against a company of desperate outlaws, and he could not be too happy at his escape.

His intention was to stay where he was for a while, and at daylight make his way back to the place where he had left Jack Winch, and with him start for Vera Cruz, not pausing unnecessarily on the way till he reached there.

He had had enough of this country to be satisfied, and when accompanied by such a small fellow as his nephew, he felt it was wrong to tempt Fate as he had done repeatedly.

He would have sought Jack out without delay, but he was too unfamiliar with the lake to make his way along its shore with any certainty.

To attempt to communicate with him by signal would be quite certain to betray him to the Mexicans, who were searching so diligently for him.

"And then," he added to himself, "at this time of night Jack is sound asleep, and it would take a steam-whistle to rouse him; so, on the whole, the best thing I can do is to await the rising of the sun."

CHAPTER XXXI

AN ALARMING DISCOVERY—A DISAPPOINTMENT

FEARFUL that he might fall asleep if he staid where he was, and be found by the Mexicans on their return, he began to cautiously withdraw from the place, with the purpose of finding a spot where he could rest in security, when he caught sight of them returning to their landing-place.

They came out from the wood like so many phantoms, and approached the spot where they expected to find the two boats.

They walked down to the spot, and then paused in silence.

They seemed to think—at least some of them did—that they had made a mistake in the locality, and there were some whispered words of consultation.

But a minute or two were enough to satisfy them that there was no error.

And then there was confusion, indeed!

There was hurrying to and fro, and the air became heavy with imprecations and threats of vengeance.

They took no pains, now, to lower their voices, but all were speaking at the same time.

There could be no mistake, either, as to the cause of the sudden disappearance of their canoes.

They had been outwitted at every point, and all that was left for them was to swallow their chagrin, and rage as best they could.

They took their disappointment with ill grace, and stamped and tore around like famishing animals deprived of their prey.

And all the time the author of their misery was crouching among the rocks and undergrowth, striving with might and main to avoid exposing himself by laughing outright.

The men were anxious to make their way back to the Haunted Island, and as there was no means at hand for doing so, they finally took themselves off in quest of other boats, that were doubtless moored somewhere along the lake.

The watcher waited where he was until they were beyond sight and hearing, when he sought out a more secure place, and stowed himself away until morning.

He did not feel exactly at ease concerning Jack Winch, whose anxiety, he feared, would lead him to do something which would cause his detection by the outlaws.

However, he recollected that he had told the boy that he would perhaps be away until morning, and he hoped that he would stay where he had been left until his return.

And so, with a prayer unto Heaven for its protection over both, he composed himself for sleep, and was soon unconscious.

When he awoke, day had dawned, and the sun was well up in the sky, and he felt as hungry as a bear.

But, before attempting to secure anything in the way of food, he determined to find Jack and to get him away from a neighborhood that had become doubly dangerous since the performances of the night.

Accordingly, he started off at once.

It was a good while before he could tell where he was, and settle in his mind the place of their first night's encampment.

He hit it at last, finding it exactly where he didn't expect to find it, as is generally the case; and then, taking that as the starting point, he was able, after much difficulty, to decide where he had parted company with Jack. When this was solved, he was vexed at his own stupidity in not seeing it before.

There it was, as it had been in plain sight all the time, the rock being so prominent that it ought to have attracted his eye at once.

"It will be nigh noon before I can reach that place," he muttered.

He had not been able to bestow much attention on the lake and Haunted Island, but he now took a look to see whether any of his enemies were visible.

There was nothing, so far as he could discover, to cause alarm.

The way to the rendezvous seemed much longer and more difficult to travel than on the preceding day, when he went over it with Jack.

Still, he made better progress than he anticipated, and he reached the place before noon.

Before making the spot, he gave the signal to his young friend, repeating it a number of times.

In no instance did he receive a single response.

The uneasiness, therefore, of the man deepened, and the conviction became strong upon him that the lad had left the spot.

Just then, he was thrilled by hearing his signal answered from a point but a short distance away.

"Thank heaven for that!" was his fervent exclamation.

Alfredo instantly repeated the call, and, as he anticipated, it was responded to with the same promptness shown on previous occasions.

And then the fellow repeated it several times on his own hook.

"That shows that it's Jack," the man said, with a laugh. "When he goes into the signaling business, he does so with his full heart. He is coming this way, too."

Within the succeeding five minutes the whistle struck

the ear of Alfredo half a dozen times, and in each instance it was nearer than before.

Of course he was hardly less prompt in responding, so as to prevent the boy from going astray.

He also walked toward him.

The next minute he heard a movement among the undergrowth, and then the bushes parted, but it was not Jack Winch, but a man and a stranger, who stepped forth.

Alfredo was so taken aback for a time, that he stood dumfoundered, and had the stranger chosen to harm him, he could have done so with perfect ease.

As soon as possible Alfredo rallied, and his amazement was succeeded by a feeling of indignation, that this fellow should have presumed to personate such a noble little boy as Jack Winch.

Alfredo knew further, before a word was spoken, that this man was one of the villains who belonged to the Haunted Island.

He half suspected that he belonged to the party that had paddled him ashore the preceding night, and that he had been left on the mainland to look for him.

The individual affected surprise.

The first shock over, he saluted Alfredo with all the politeness for which the upper classes among the Spanish are noted.

In acknowledgment of his salutation, Alfredo demanded:

"Why did you answer my call to another?"

"Pardon me, but I might ask why you answered my call to a friend. I was listening for such a whistle as you made, when it fell on my ears, and I replied. Then you called again, and in accordance with a custom which I and my friend have, I repeated it several times."

Alfredo knew this was a falsehood, though he could not but admit it was an ingenious one.

Nothing could convince him that there were any two persons in the world who called to each other in the way and manner that he and Jack did. Still he judged it best not to dispute the man for the time.

"Where is your friend?" asked Alfredo.

"I parted from him last night, and set out this morning to meet him. I wonder much at his absence; we ought to have come together long ago."

"Where did you spend last night?"

The stranger, who carried his rifle and pistols the same as most of the specimens of humanity encountered in this part of the world, turned his head and pointed up the mountain behind him.

"There we encamped, and we agreed to start this forenoon hunting in the lake, which cannot be done, because the forenoon is about gone."

"Do you know the island is haunted?" asked Alfredo, looking sharply at the fellow, in the hope of catching him in some of his falsehoods.

The man started as if astonished, and stared at the questioner.

"I have heard that there is some such place, but I didn't know that I was so near."

"That you are, and the best thing for you to do is to leave."

"So I think," and without another word, he turned about and hurried away among the rocks and trees!

This was unexpected to Alfredo, who was suspicious of treachery, and who believed that the man had some scheme in view in leaving him in such an abrupt manner.

Alfredo himself did not stay where he was, but made his way along the lake to another rock, upon which he clambered with the purpose of taking an observation.

Lying flat on his face he pointed his telescope in the direction of the Haunted Island and had studied the place but a moment, when he cried:

"Can it be possible? Alas, it is too true!"

Young Jack Winch was on the Haunted Island!

The prospect was so disheartening that he was half disposed to give it up, and making his way to the nearest town, open negotiations for the ransom of the lad. Were the circumstances any different, he would have done this, but he was impressed with the terrible dread that the outlaws were so enraged that they would not wait.

In the faint hope of arresting Jack before he passed from view, Alfredo whistled across the lake to the lad, but the distance was such that he could not have heard or recognized it, for he made no sign, and the next moment he was gone.

It would seem hardly possible that Jack could have made his way to the island at midday, as he had done, without detection from the enemies of himself and uncle.

And yet the latter was not without hope that he could open communication with the little fellow before the Mexicans laid violent hands on him.

Jack had discussed with him the necessity of keeping clear of these men, and though he had run great risk in approaching the island as he did, he would make partial amends by using the greater precaution after landing.

However, this was all conjecture, and to do anything it was necessary that he should also secure a boat.

Accordingly, he left the place in quest of one.

Alfredo was sorely perplexed, being in that distressing state of mind which one has when he cannot be certain that he is following the best course for him.

He was more successful than he anticipated at the beginning, for he had gone but a short distance when he came upon the tiniest canoe which he had yet seen.

Only by the merest accident did he discover it, it being drawn up among some dense undergrowth where he struck his foot against it as he was passing by.

"Well, now, that's what I call lucky!" he exclaimed, with a slight thrill of hope. "I was afraid I would have to spend an hour or two in hunting for a boat, and here it is."

An examination showed that it was made of bark, very delicate and graceful in structure, and had not been in the water for some time.

Near by lay a small paddle, so that it was complete and ready for use.

When Alfredo placed it in the water, he saw that its buoyancy was just sufficient to bear his weight.

It had evidently been made for the use of a single person, and he doubted whether it was sufficient to carry Jack in addition to himself.

He was disposed to believe that the frail craft belonged to some female—some queen of the haunted isle, perhaps.

The question was as to how he should reach the spot of land in the middle of the lake.

He was busy conjuring up some scheme by which he could play a sort of Indian trick upon the outlaws, and deceive them while making his way to the island.

His idea was that he might place himself in the bot-

tom of the small canoe, there being just enough room, and paddle the boat without allowing himself to be seen.

Carefully stepping within, he adjusted himself as carefully as if he were a package of nitro-glycerine, and at last shoved the boat from shore.

After drifting along for a distance of a hundred yards, he pointed the muzzle of his field-glass over the edge of the canoe and scrutinized the Haunted Island. It was so important that no mistake should be made, that he determined not to allow the smallest thing to escape him.

But the result was as favorable as he could expect.

The island, as far as he could tell, looked precisely as it did when he first contemplated it.

There was not the sign of life on or about it.

From this fact he felt warranted in concluding that he had not been detected by any one upon the island.

He now changed the course of the craft, so that, while still avoiding a direct approach to the land, he was nearer to doing so than before.

This was kept up for some distance before he resorted to his telescope again.

Being closer than before, Alfredo felt that the danger of the situation was greater than ever, and he could not be too cautious.

It would have been hard for the most stealthy Indian to have stirred anywhere along the shore of the island

while he was making his scrutiny without betraying himself.

Beginning at the right hand corner, at the furthest point in his field of vision, he carefully examined every portion as it came up under the object glass.

In this way nothing escaped him, and when he had finished, he turned and went back over the same ground.

Still the result was as encouraging as before.

The explorer could not be exactly satisfied, even though he was encouraged, for all this absence of life to the eye was no proof that it was not there.

It was no proof, either, that there were not a half-dozen Mexicans, with gleaming knives and eager eyes, waiting until he should approach so nigh that he could not retreat.

The situation, at the best, was of the gravest character, as he fully realized while he continued making his way over the lake in the direction of the Haunted Island.

It was strange that during all this time Alfredo never once had detected the least sign of life, when there could be scarcely a doubt that there were several persons on the island.

An experienced Indian scout would have seen something suspicious in the very absence of life.

But he was timid and hopeful, and he continued

pushing his way along in this cautious manner until he was within a hundred yards.

Feeling it useless to loiter any more, he now headed straight for shore, and in a few minutes his canoe touched the bank at a point where he could land without difficulty.

And he landed the next moment.

Strange it was that, during all this time, when he had kept such close watch upon the shore in front, it had never occurred to him to cast one look at the rear, at the shore he had left.

THE END

SPECIAL CIRCULAR TO EDUCATORS

"Masterpieces of the World's Literature"

THE PREMIUM LIBRARY

Is extensively used by schools and colleges for supplementary reading. It is issued in attractive 16mo shape, paper covers, printed from clear, readable type, on good paper. Many of the volumes are illustrated. They are published at the low price of **TEN CENTS** each, or 12 books for one dollar. Postage paid. Special prices quoted to schools for larger quantities.

1. Abbé Constantin. Ludovic Halévy.
2. Æsop's Fables.
3. Black Beauty. Anna Sewell.
4. Bracebridge Hall. Irving.
5. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Byron.
6. Coming Race. Bulwer.
7. Cranford. Mrs. Gaskell.
8. Crown of Wild Olive. Ruskin.
9. Discourses of Epictetus.
10. Dreams. Olive Schreiner.
11. Dream Life. Ik Marvel.
12. Drummond's Addresses.
13. Emerson's Earlier Essays.
14. Ethics of the Dust. Ruskin.
15. Frankenstein. Mrs. Shelley.
16. Uncle Tom's Cabin. Mrs. Stowe.
17. Lady of the Lake. Scott.
18. Lalla Rookh. Thomas Moore.
19. Lamb's Essays of Elia.
20. Lamb's Last Essays of Elia.
21. Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare, I.
22. Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare, II.
23. Lays of Ancient Rome. Macaulay.
24. Lays of Scottish Cavaliers.
25. Light of Asia. Sir E. Arnold.
26. Longfellow's Poems.
27. Lowell's Poems.
28. Mornings in Florence. Ruskin.
29. One of the Profession. M. White, Jr.
30. Paul and Virginia. B. St. Pierre.
31. Pleasures of Life. Sir J. Lubbock.
32. Poe's Poems.
33. Princess. Tennyson.
34. Queen of the Air. Ruskin.
35. Rab and His Friends. Dr. J. Brown.
36. Rasselas. Johnson.
37. Reveries of a Bachelor. Ik Marvel.
38. Representative Men. Emerson.
39. Sartor Resartus. Carlyle.
40. Scarlet Letter. Hawthorne.
41. Sesame and Lilies. Ruskin.
42. Ships that Pass in the Night. Beatrice Harraden.
43. St. Mark's Rest. Ruskin.
44. Thoughts from Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.
45. Tillyloss Scandal. J. M. Barrie.
46. Twice-Told Tales, I. Hawthorne.
47. Twice-Told Tales, II. Hawthorne.
48. In Memoriam. Tennyson.
49. Vicar of Wakefield. Goldsmith.
50. Whittier's Poems.
51. Autocrat of the Breakfast Table. Holmes.
52. Heroes and Hero Worship. Carlyle.
53. Mosses from an Old Manse, I. Hawthorne.
54. Mosses from an Old Manse, II. Hawthorne.
55. Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin.
56. Song of Hiawatha. Longfellow.
57. Evangeline, and Poems. Longfellow.
58. Sketch Book. Irving.
59. Stickit Minister. S. R. Crockett.
60. House of the Seven Gables. Hawthorne.
61. Poetical Works of Robert Browning.
62. Paradise Lost. Milton.
63. Hamlet. Shakespeare.
64. Julius Cæsar. Shakespeare.
65. Book of Golden Deeds. Yonge.
66. Child's History of England. Dickens.
67. Confessions of an Opium Eater. De Quincey.
68. Ten Nights in a Barroom. Arthur.
69. Treasure Island. Stevenson.
70. Tanglewood Tales. Hawthorne.
71. In His Steps. Chas. M. Sheldon.
72. Natural Law in the Spiritual World. Henry Drummond.
73. Imitation of Christ. T. à Kempis.
74. Paradise Regained. John Milton.
75. Water Babies. Kingsley.
76. Flower Fables. L. M. Alcott.
77. Blithedale Romance. Hawthorne.
78. Prue and I. G. W. Curtis.
79. Grandfather's Chair. Hawthorne.
80. Bacon's Essays.
81. Idylls of the King. Tennyson.
82. Wonder Book. Hawthorne.
83. Cricket on the Hearth. C. Dickens.
84. Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow. Jerome K. Jerome.
85. Inez. Augusta J. Evans.
86. Kidnapped. R. L. Stevenson.
87. Lucile. Owen Meredith.
88. Phillips Brooks' Addresses.
89. Prince of the House of David. Professor Ingraham.
90. Three Men in a Boat. J. K. Jerome.

All of the above titles can also be supplied in our famous STANDARD SERIES, handsomely bound in cloth, assorted colors, with an artistic design, at **FIFTEEN CENTS** per volume, postage paid. Special prices quoted to schools for larger quantities.

(14) **THE MERSHON COMPANY**

156 Fifth Ave., New York **Rahway, N. J.**

THE FAMOUS HENTY BOOKS

The Boys' Own Library

12mo, Cloth

G. A. Henty has long held the field as the most popular boys' author. Age after age of heroic deeds has been the subject of his pen, and the knights of old seem very real in his pages. Always wholesome and manly, always heroic and of high ideals, his books are more than popular wherever the English language is spoken.

Each volume is printed on excellent paper from new large-type plates, bound in cloth, assorted colors, with an attractive ink and gold stamp. **Price 50 Cents.**

A Final Reckoning
A Tale of Bush Life in Australia
Among the Malay Pirates
By England's Aid
The Freeing of the Netherlands
By Right of Conquest
A Tale of Cortez in Mexico
Bravest of the Brave
A Tale of Peterborough in Spain
By Pike and Dyke
The Rise of the Dutch Republic
By Sheer Pluck
A Tale of the Ashantee War
Bonnie Prince Charlie
A Tale of Fontenoy and Culloden
Captain Bayley's Heir
A Tale of the Gold Fields of California
Cat of Bubastes
A Story of Ancient Egypt
Colonel Thorndyke's Secret
Cornet of Horse
A Tale of Marlborough's Wars
Facing Death
A Tale of the Coal Mines
Friends, though Divided
A Tale of the Civil War in England
For Name and Fame
A Tale of Afghan Warfare
For the Temple
A Tale of the Fall of Jerusalem
In Freedom's Cause
A Story of Wallace and Bruce
In the Reign of Terror
The Adventures of a Westminster Boy
In Times of Peril A Tale of India
Jack Archer A Tale of the Crimea
Lion of St. Mark
A Tale of Venice in the XIV. Century
Lion of the North
A Tale of Gustavus Adolphus
Maori and Settler
A Tale of the New Zealand War
Orange and Green
A Tale of the Boyne and Limerick
One of the 28th A Tale of Waterloo
Out on the Pampas
A Tale of South America
Rujub the Juggler
St. George for England
A Tale of Crécy and Poictiers
Sturdy and Strong
True to the Old Flag
A Tale of the Revolution
The Golden Cañon
The Lost Heir
The Young Colonists
A Tale of the Zulu and Boer Wars
The Young Midshipman
The Dragon and the Raven
A Tale of King Alfred
The Boy Knight
A Tale of the Crusades
Through the Fray
A Story of the Luddite Riots
Under Drake's Flag
A Tale of the Spanish Main
With Wolfe in Canada
The Tale of Winning a Continent
With Clive in India
The Beginning of an Empire
With Lee in Virginia
A Story of the American Civil War
Young Carthaginian
A Story of the Times of Hannibal
Young Buglers
A Tale of the Peninsular War
Young Franc-Tireurs
A Tale of the Franco-Prussian War

THE MERSHON COMPANY
[illegible] Fifth Ave., New York **Rahway, N. J.**

FLAG OF FREEDOM SERIES

By CAPTAIN RALPH BONEHILL

Volumes Illustrated, Bound in Cloth, with a very Attractive Cover. Price $1.25 per Volume, or Set of Five in Box for $6.00

BOYS OF THE FORT; or, A Young Captain's Pluck

Captain Bonehill is at his best when relating a tale of military adventure, and this story of stirring doings at one of our well-known forts in the Wild West is of more than ordinary interest. The young captain had a difficult task to accomplish, but he had been drilled to do his duty, and he did it thoroughly. Gives a good insight into army life of to-day.

THE YOUNG BANDMASTER; or, Concert Stage and Battlefield

In this tale Captain Bonehill touches upon a new field. The hero is a youth with a passion for music, who, compelled to make his own way in the world, becomes a cornetist in an orchestra, and works his way up, first, to the position of a soloist, and then to that of leader of a brass band. He is carried off to sea and falls in with a secret-service cutter bound for Cuba, and while in that island joins a military band which accompanies our soldiers in the never-to-be-forgotten attack on Santiago. A mystery connected with the hero's inheritance adds to the interest of the tale.

OFF FOR HAWAII; or, The Mystery of a Great Volcano

Here we have fact and romance cleverly interwoven. Several boys start on a tour of the Hawaiian Islands. They have heard that there is a treasure located in the vicinity of Kilauea, the largest active volcano in the world, and go in search of it. Their numerous adventures will be followed with much interest.

A SAILOR BOY WITH DEWEY; or, Afloat in the Philippines

The story of Dewey's victory in Manila Bay will never grow old, but here we have it told in a new form—not as those in command witnessed the contest, but as it appeared to a real, live American youth who was in the navy at the time. Many adventures in Manila and in the interior follow, giving true-to-life scenes from this remote portion of the globe. A book that should be in every boy's library.

WHEN SANTIAGO FELL; or, The War Adventures of Two Chums

Captain Bonehill has never penned a better tale than this stirring story of adventures in Cuba. Two boys, an American and his Cuban chum, leave New York to join their parents in the interior of Cuba. The war between Spain and the Cubans is on, and the boys are detained at Santiago de Cuba, but escape by crossing the bay at night. Many adventures between the lines follow, and a good pen-picture of General Garcia is given. The American lad, with others, is captured and cast into a dungeon in Santiago; and then follows the never-to-be-forgotten campaign in Cuba under General Shafter. How the hero finally escapes makes reading no wide-awake boy will want to miss.

Press Opinions of Captain Bonehill's Books for Boys

"Captain Bonehill's stories will always be popular with our boys, for the reason that they are thoroughly up-to-date and true to life. As a writer of outdoor tales he has no rival."—*Bright Days.*

"The story is by Captain Ralph Bonehill, and that is all that need be said about it, for all of our readers know that the captain is one of America's best story-tellers, so far as stories for young people go."—*Young People of America.*

"We understand that Captain Bonehill will soon be turning from sporting stories to tales of the war. This field is one in which he should feel thoroughly at home. We are certain that the boys will look eagerly for the Bonehill war tales."—*Weekly Messenger.*

(a) **THE MERSHON COMPANY**

156 Fifth Ave., New York **Rahway, N. J.**

MRS. L. T. MEADE'S

FAMOUS BOOKS FOR GIRLS

12mo, Cloth ● Price $1.25

There are few more favorite authors with American girls than Mrs. L. T. MEADE, whose copyright works can only be had from us. Essentially a writer for the home, with the loftiest aims and purest sentiments, Mrs. Meade's books possess the merit of utility as well as the means of amusement. They are girls' books—written for girls, and fitted for every home.

Here will be found no maudlin nonsense as to the affections. There are no counts in disguise nor castles in Spain. It is pure and wholesome literature of a high order with a lofty ideal.

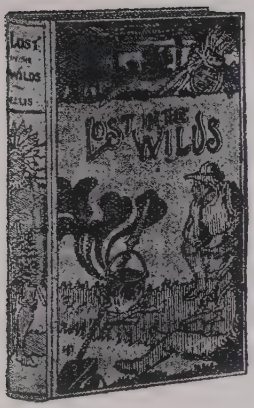
The volumes are all copyright, excellently printed with clear, open type, uniformly bound in best cloth, with ink and gold stamp.

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE TITLES

The Children of Wilton Chase
Bashful Fifteen
Betty: A Schoolgirl
Four on an Island
Girls New and Old
Out of the Fashion
The Palace Beautiful
Polly, a New-Fashioned Girl
Red Rose and Tiger Lily
Temptation of Olive Latimer
A Ring of Rubies
A Sweet Girl Graduate
A World of Girls
Good Luck
A Girl in Ten Thousand
A Young Mutineer
Wild Kitty
The Children's Pilgrimage
The Girls of St. Wode's
Light o' the Morning
Bad Little Hannah
Rebellion of Lill Carrington
A Little Mother to the Others
Merry Girls of England

THE MERSHON COMPANY

156 Fifth Ave., New York Rahway, N. J.



EDWARD S. ELLIS'

POPULAR BOYS' BOOKS

12mo, Cloth **Price, $1.25**

Purely American in scene, plot, motives, and characters, the copyright works of EDWARD S. ELLIS are deservedly popular with the youth of America. In a community where every native-born boy can aspire to the highest offices, such a book as Ellis' "From the Throttle to the President's Chair," detailing the progress of the sturdy son of the people from locomotive engineer to the presidency of a great railroad, must always be popular. The youth of the land which boasts of a Vanderbilt will ever desire such books, and naturally will desire stories of their native land before wandering over foreign climes.

The volumes of this series are all copyright, printed from large new type, on good paper, and are handsomely bound in cloth, stamped with appropriate designs.

THE FOLLOWING COMPRISE THE TITLES

Down the Mississippi
From the Throttle to the President's Chair
Up the Tapajos
Tad; or, "Getting Even" with Him
Lost in Samoa
Red Plume **Lost in the Wilds**
A Waif of the Mountains
Land of Wonders
Through Jungle and Wilderness
Life of Kit Carson

THE MERSHON COMPANY

256 Fifth Ave., New York Rahway, N. J.

The Rise in Life Series

BY

HORATIO ALGER, Jr.

COMPLETED BY

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

12mo, Cloth, Handsomely Illustrated, Price, per Volume, $1.25

OUT FOR BUSINESS; or, Robert Frost's Strange Career

One of several volumes left unfinished by Horatio Alger, Jr., at his death, and completed by his friend and fellow author Arthur M. Winfield. It relates the adventures of a country boy who is compelled to leave home and seek his fortune in the great world at large. A book every lad will enjoy perusing.

FALLING IN WITH FORTUNE; or, The Experiences of a Young Secretary

This is a companion tale to "Out for Business," but complete in itself, and tells of the further doings of Robert Frost as private secretary to a very rich lady. The lady has a nephew who is trying to acquire her fortune, and the hero's actions to protect his patron are as praiseworthy as they are interesting.

YOUNG CAPTAIN JACK; or, The Son of a Soldier

In Mr. Alger's characteristic vein, but with a plot quite different from anything else he has done. The scene is laid in the South during the Civil War, and the hero is a waif who was cast up by the sea and adopted by a rich Southern planter. The mystery surrounding the lad's birth is so peculiar that no one who takes up the volume will wish to lay it down without finishing it.

NELSON THE NEWSBOY; or, Afloat in New York

Mr. Alger is always at his best in the portrayal of life in New York City, and this story may safely be counted among the best he has given our young people. The various scenes are true to life, and the adventures of the hero are such as any boy will follow with close attention.

Any Volume Sent, Postpaid, on Receipt of Price

(55) **THE MERSHON COMPANY**

156 Fifth Avenue, New York **Rahway, N. J.**

"One of the First Requisites of Expansion"

THE POCKET DICTIONARY

OF THE

English and Spanish Languages

BY

WESSELY and GIRONES

Thoroughly Revised and Entirely Rewritten

BY

LOUIS TOHHAUSEN

Officer of the Legion of Honor

AND

GEORGE PAYN

An essentially practical English-Spanish and Spanish-English Pocket Dictionary, designed especially to meet the needs of the soldier, colonist, capitalist, traveler, or explorer in our new colonial possessions. Invaluable for visitors to Cuba, Porto Rico, the Philippine Islands, or Spain, and absolutely indispensable for American residents in those countries. Just the book for the merchant dealing with Spanish-America. Especially suited for commercial use.

Bound in Best English Cloth, 12mo, 475 Pages, Price 75 Cents
For sale everywhere, or sent postpaid on receipt of price

(13) THE MERSHON COMPANY

156 Fifth Avenue, New York Rahway, N. J.

"A good dictionary is the first requisite in the study of a language"

THE NEW PRACTICAL

French-English and English-French DICTIONARY

Compiled from the best Authorities of Both Languages

BY

Professors DE LOLME and WALLACE

AND

HENRY BRIDGEMAN

Revised, Corrected, and Considerably Enlarged

BY

Professor E. ROUBAUD, B. A. (Paris)

This excellent dictionary, prepared for practical use by highly competent authorities, contains in 1122 crown 8vo pages the following special features:

1. It is modern and up to date, being based on the latest edition of the famous dictionary of the French Academy, and has been carefully revised with the latest and best English dictionaries.
2. The type is plain, clear, and expressly suited for ready reference.
3. Careful examples are given of the different senses of various words. Full explanation is made of all idiomatic phrases, etc.
4. Special attention has been devoted to the intricacies of verbs. Lists are given of Irregular and Defective Verbs, and of Nouns of Double Gender.
5. Compound Verbs are translated by their corresponding equivalents.
6. Obsolete Words and Terms are specially indicated.

French and English Vocabularies are given of Proper Names, Historical, Mythological, and Geographical. Tables of French Coins, Weights, and Measures, with English equivalents.

Bound in Best English Cloth, Crown 8vo, 1122 Pages, Price $1.25

For sale everywhere, or sent postpaid on receipt of price

(9) THE MERSHON COMPANY

156 Fifth Avenue, New York Rahway, N. J.

THE MERSHON COMPANY

Printing House, Rahway, N. J. **156 Fifth Ave., New York**

ELIZABETH AND HER GERMAN GARDEN

Is one of the most popular books of the year, uncommonly so for a book which is not a story, still less an essay—which is simply indescribably fresh and a delightful glimpse into a world of outdoor life among flowers, and bits of quaint German indoor home life, with the element of child life.

"We find ourselves in the presence of a whimsical, humorous, cultured, and very womanly woman, with a pleasant, old-fashioned liking for homeliness and simplicity, with a wise husband, three merry babies, . . . a few friends, a gardener, an old German house to repose in, a garden to be happy in, an agreeable literary gift, and a slight touch of cynicism. Such is Elizabeth. It is a charming book."—*The Academy.*

Small 12mo, Cloth, Price 50 Cents

AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S LOVE LETTERS

A LITERARY SENSATION

The London *Daily Mail* says: "Mr. John Murray, the publisher, told a *Daily Mail* representative yesterday that 'An Englishwoman's Love Letters' had sold better than anything his firm had published for the last twenty-five years.

"'I do not know who wrote it,' said Mr. Murray, 'and I cannot even guess. My impression is that the letters were genuine enough, and that they were edited by a literary hand, so as to give them that perfect touch which has made them such a delight to the reading public. At present there is simply a wild run on the book.'"

Small 12mo, Cloth, Price 50 Cents

BLACK ROCK. *A TALE OF THE SELKIRKS*

"'Ralph Connor' is some man's *nom de plume.* The world will insist on knowing whose. He has painted for us a picture of life in the lumber and mining camps of surpassing merit. With perfect wholesomeness, with exquisite delicacy, with entire fidelity, with truest pathos, with freshest humor, he has delineated character, has analyzed motives and emotions, and has portrayed life. Some of his characters deserve immortality, so faithfully are they created."—*St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

Small 12mo, Cloth, Price 50 Cents

CONCERNING ISABEL CARNABY

A NOVEL. By ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER, author of "The Farringdons," "A Double Thread," etc.

"For brilliant conversations, epigrammatic bits of philosophy, keenness of wit, and full insight into human nature, 'Concerning Isabel Carnaby' is a remarkable success."—*Boston Transcript.*

Small 12mo, Cloth, Price 50 Cents

THE ROVER BOYS SERIES

For Young Americans

By ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

Each Volume Handsomely Illustrated and Bound in Cloth

Price $1.25 per Volume **Set of Five in Box, $6.00**

THE ROVER BOYS ON THE GREAT LAKES; or, The Secret of the Island Cave

The action of this story takes place on Lake Erie and Lake Huron. The Rover boys are off on an outing, when some old enemies turn up and make it decidely lively for them. A lonely island is visited, and the secret of the cave is such as is calculated to hold the majority of youthful readers spellbound.

THE ROVER BOYS OUT WEST; or, The Search for a Missing Mine

In this tale the Rover boys are first taken back to dear old Putnam Hall school, and then transported to the mountainous districts of Colorado. A valuable mining property cannot be located, and the missing mine is claimed by both the Rovers and their enemies. Many adventures are encountered, including one with a landslide which is realistic in the extreme; and the tale is one which is bound to please both boys and girls.

THE ROVER BOYS IN THE JUNGLE; or, Stirring Adventures in Africa

The father of the Rover boys had gone to Africa and had not been heard of for a long time. At last, unable to stand the suspense, the boys, accompanied by some older heads, start on a search for the missing parent. The hunt leads them into the very heart of the Dark Continent, where they become lost and fall in with many strange and savage natives. How all escape makes reading that nobody would care to miss.

THE ROVER BOYS ON THE OCEAN; or, A Chase for a Fortune

This is a complete story in itself, but forms the second volume of the series. During a vacation at the school a fortune is stolen and carried off to sea, and Sam, Tom, and Dick lose no time in following up the missing treasure. On the ocean they fall in with numerous adventures, as thrilling as they are absorbing.

THE ROVER BOYS AT SCHOOL; or, The Cadets of Putnam Hall

Arthur M. Winfield has written many tales for boys, but he has penned nothing better than this story of life and adventure at an American military school, introducing as he does all sorts and conditions of boys, as well as several girls, and a plot that is bound to hold the reader's attention from start to finish. Anybody who loves an out-and-out boy's book should read this volume.

Other volumes of this series in preparation.

Press Notices of Arthur M. Winfield's Books for Young People

"He knows how to tell a story that will take possession of the reader from the first page."—*Rochester (N. Y.) Post-Express.*

"His school stories cannot be surpassed. They are true to life, and his boys are real, live, flesh-and-blood fellows."—*Bright Days.*

"A new story by Mr. Winfield is always hailed with delight, for the boys know they are going to get just what they are looking for—something bright and wholesome, without being either too sensational or too wishy-washy."—*Young People of America.*

THE MERSHON COMPANY

156 Fifth Ave., New York **Rahway, N. J.**